



Exploring Learning Opportunity: The Netherlands

September 2016

In September, a small delegation participated in an exploratory learning opportunity in the Netherlands. At the invitation of colleagues in the Netherlands who attended the Quest conference, we explored future partnerships and learning opportunities that could benefit the work of the Board with a specific focus on well-being.

Over the last six years, we have seen average delegations of over 80 people from the Netherlands attending the Quest conference and visiting our Board. This includes a delegation of 86 in 2016 and 117 in 2015.

We have had opportunities to engage in dialogue with them about their education system and what we can learn from one another to continue advancing student achievement and well-being. Shortly after the 2016 Quest conference, we were invited to continue this dialogue and learning in the Netherlands.

Discovery Trip to China

- Summer Teach Abroad Program
- Teacher and administrator visits
- Student exchanges
- International students
- International Languages
- Teacher exchanges



We want to briefly draw parallels with a similar fact-finding exploratory opportunity in which the Board participated in the early 2000s, when a team from the Board visited China. Similar to this opportunity in the Netherlands, this was not a traditional jurisdictional learning opportunity. The purpose of the visit was to develop and expand relationships and explore other learning opportunities with colleagues in China that could benefit the work of our Board.

That visit has since yielded a number of positive results from which the Board and its staff members and students continue to benefit from today, including: -The Summer Teach Abroad Program gives teachers and administrators from our Board an opportunity to gain teaching experience in a different context, participate in professional learning and develop a better understanding of different cultures. -Our Board hosts teachers and administrators from China interested in learning more about our schools and programs. While they are here, we also engage in dialogue to enhance our learning and understanding about what is happening in their jurisdiction. -We host small groups of students accompanied by a teacher on student exchanges. They are billeted with local families and attend school in our Board for a short period of time. This provides opportunities for cultural learning for them and for our own students. -Through the relationships we have built with our colleagues in China and through the Summer Teach Abroad Program, we have attracted a number of international students to our Board. -Some of the organizations with which we developed relationships continue to support our International Languages programs through generous resource donations. These programs gives students an opportunity to learn a new language or maintain their heritage language. -We have also been able to support some individual teachers who have expressed an interest in gaining some international teaching experience for a limited period of time.

Why Netherlands?

Report Card 11 released by UNICEF charts the well-being of children in 29 rich countries



Why are Dutch children so happy?

**BBC
NEWS**

**They raise the world's
happiest children - so is it
time you went Dutch?**

The Telegraph

**Best Country In The World For
Kids Has A Lot To Teach Canada**

HUFF POST
PARENTS
CANADA

Dutch Kids Ranked Happiest in the World

Dutch Daily News

Of particular interest to us in YRDSB, the Netherlands has been gaining attention for achieving results when it comes to child well-being on a number of measures.

In our Board, we have long recognized that achievement and well-being go hand-in-hand. In addition, mental health is one of our three areas of focus, because we understand its importance when it comes to student well-being and achievement.

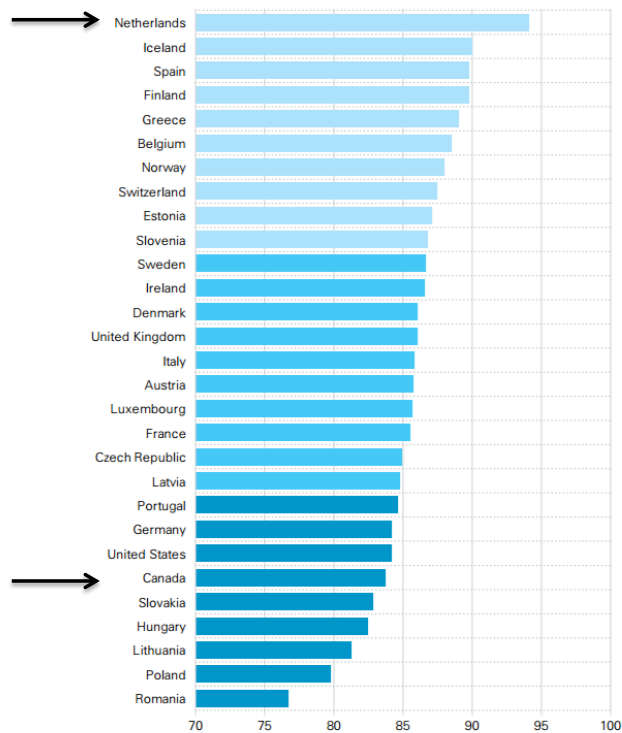
In particular, we are interested to learn what the Dutch are doing to support well-being in schools, and what we can learn from their experiences and approaches that can be adapted and implemented here in York Region.

Ranking	Country	Overall well-being (Average rank all 5 dimensions)	Dimension 1 Material well- being (rank)	Dimension 2 Health and safety (rank)	Dimension 3 Education (rank)	Dimension 4 Behaviours and risks (rank)	Dimension 5 Housing and environment (rank)
1	Netherlands	2.4	1	5	1	1	4
2	Norway	4.6	3	7	6	4	3
3	Iceland	5	4	1	10	3	7
4	Finland	5.4	2	3	4	12	6
5	Sweden	6.2	5	2	11	5	8
6	Germany	9	11	12	13	6	13
7	Luxembourg	9.2	6	4	22	9	5
8	Switzerland	9.6	9	11	16	11	1
9	Belgium	11.2	13	13	2	14	14
10	Ireland	11.6	17	15	17	7	2
11	Denmark	11.8	12	23	7	2	15
12	Slovenia	12	8	6	5	21	20
13	France	12.8	10	10	15	13	16
14	Czech Republic	15.2	16	8	12	22	18
15	Portugal	15.6	21	14	18	8	17
16	United Kingdom	15.8	14	16	24	15	10
17	Canada	16.6	15	27	14	16	11
18	Austria	17	7	26	23	17	12
19	Spain	17.6	24	9	26	20	9
20	Hungary	18.4	18	20	8	24	22

Source: UNICEF Office of Research (2013). *Child Well-Being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview*, Innocenti Report Card 11, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

This chart is taken from a 2013 UNICEF study which ranked the Netherlands first when it comes to child well-being. It was also the only country that ranked among the top five in all of the five dimensions of child well-being that were measured. This includes ranking first when it comes to educational well-being, and behaviours and risks.

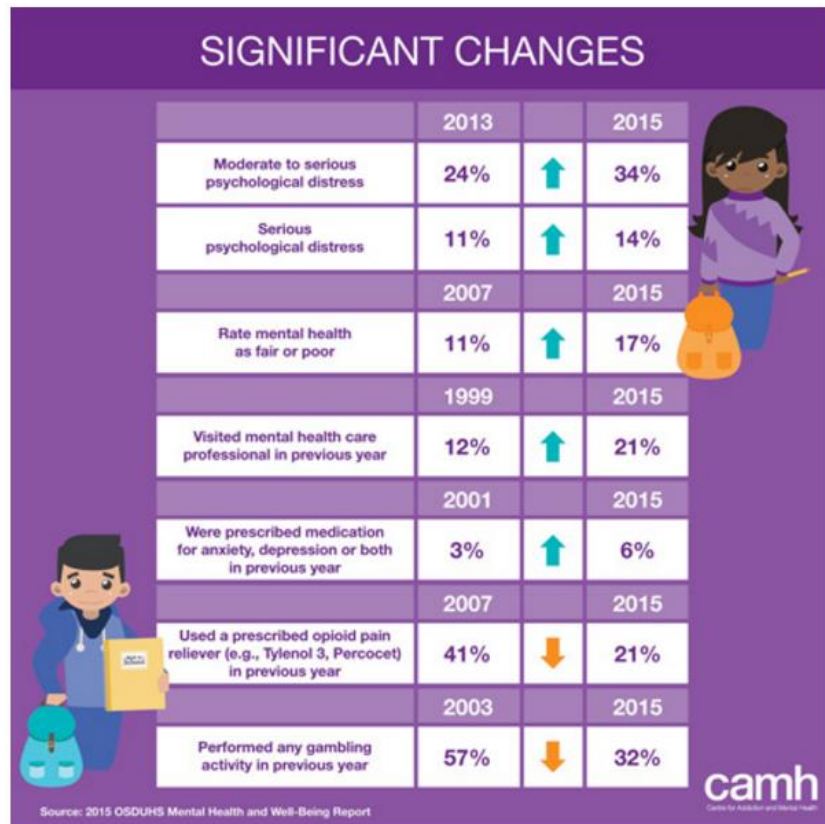
Figure 6.0 The children's life satisfaction league table (2009/2010)
 % of children aged 11, 13 and 15 who rate their life satisfaction with a score of 6 or more on the 11-step 'Cantril Ladder' scale



Source: UNICEF Office of Research (2013). *Child Well-Being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview*, Innocenti Report Card 11. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

In addition, nearly 95% of Dutch children themselves reported a high level of life satisfaction. Canada dropped in these rankings from previous years, and is in the bottom third.

It should be noted that nearly 85% of students reported a high level of life satisfaction, however there is clearly still some room for improvement.



Source: Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., & Mann, R. E., (2015). *Drug use among Ontario students, 1977-2015: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 41). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

To point to one indicator, according to a Centre for Addiction and Mental Health study, we continue to see an increase in the number of students experiencing stress and mental illness. - Findings from the CAMH study are below. -

- In 2013, 24 % of students reported moderate to serious psychological distress which increased to 34% in 2015.
- In 2013, 11% of students reported serious psychological distress which increased to 14% in 2015.
- In 2007, 11% of students rated their mental health as fair or poor and in 2015 this increased to 17%.
- In 1999, 12% of students visited mental health care professionals in the previous year and this increased to 21% in 2015.
- In 2001, 3% of students were prescribed medication for anxiety, depression or both in the previous year and this increased to 6% in 2015.
- In 2007, 41% of students used a prescribed opioid pain reliever (e.g. Tylenol 3, Percocet) in the previous year and this decreased to 21% in 2015.
- In 2003, 57% of students performed gambling activity in the previous year and this decreased to 32% in 2015.

- Impaired cognitive development
- Lower levels of school achievement
- Reduced skills and expectations
- Lower productivity and earnings
- Higher rates of unemployment
- Antisocial behaviour
- Involvement in crime
- Greater likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse
- Higher levels of teenage births
- Higher incidence of mental illness

Source: UNICEF Office of Research (2013). Child Well-Being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview, Innocenti Report Card 11. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

It is also worth highlighting that the same UNICEF study also identifies that the “failure to protect and promote wellbeing of children is associated with increased risk of number of outcomes”

This is not the future we want for our students, and further highlights the importance of the work that we are doing in the Board to support and promote student well-being.



Last year, the Ministry of Education released its discussion paper on well-being, outlining four priorities for student well-being:

- Equity and inclusive education
- Safe and accepting schools
- Health schools
- Positive mental health

We know this is an area of priority for the Province moving forward.

Source: Ministry of Education (2016); Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education: A Discussion; Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario;

Why Netherlands?

- Academic achievement
- Student retention
- School improvement
- School leadership
- Teaching profession
- Assessment and evaluation

In addition to their results when it comes to well-being, it's also worth noting that Netherlands also continues to see -

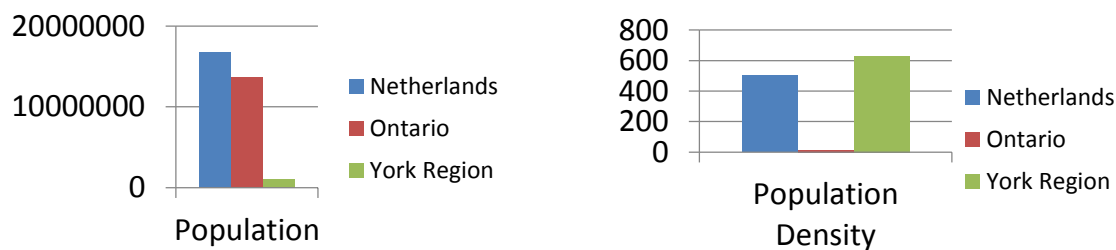
- above average PISA scores
- high adult literacy rates -high enrolment in vocational education and training
- above OECD average
- And has a focus on student retention; with a drop-out rate below 2.5% -

Among other things, they have also introduced measures in recent years to stimulate school improvement, and new professional development measures for school leaders and teachers. -

Our Board has proven to be a leader in the past, and we are committed to continuing to demonstrate leadership when it comes to student achievement and well-being. That includes learning from practices in other jurisdictions. And so we sent a small delegation to the Netherlands to explore what we could learn from their approach and education system.

**Source: OECD (2014). [Education Policy Outlook: Netherlands](#).*

Demographics



To provide you with some context, the Netherlands has a population of just over 17 million. A relatively small country in area, it is considered to have a high population density (approx 488 people per square kilometre). As you can see from the chart, while Ontario has a much lower population density, the density is significantly higher in York Region.

Sources: World Bank, Statistics Canada

The population predominantly identifies as Dutch and speaks the Dutch language. Approximately 11% of the population was born outside the Netherlands. In contrast, in Canada, about 20% of the population was not born in Canada. Canada and York Region have a more diverse population than the Netherlands.

Source: OECD/European Union (2015). [Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In](#). Paris: OECD Publishing.

Education in Netherlands

- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
 - vwo-diploma (university preparatory education)
 - havo-diploma (senior general secondary education)
 - vmbo diploma (preparatory secondary vocational education)

Every child must start school by age 5, although many start at age four.

Primary education lasts eight years. After that, students opt for one of three types of secondary programs:

pre-university – a 6-year program

senior general secondary – a 5-year program

pre-vocational – a 4-year

Most secondary schools offer several types of programs so students can transfer from one type of program to another. Students make the decision based on school recommendations, their own preference and often the results of a national test.

While overall responsibility lies with the State (i.e. financing, general education policy, structure), administration and management of primary and secondary schools is locally organized. The composition of school boards varies across the country.

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education monitors school quality and compliance with legislation. It also publishes an annual report on the state of education in the country.

Observations

- Autonomy
- Competence
- Trust



We engaged in professional learning and dialogue with educational researchers as well as officials from the Inspectorate of Education. We also examined practices at a [KPZ](#), a [teacher education university](#) and several schools, including:

- A primary school -A multi-functional building that houses several different organizations
- A secondary school that ran a program for students at risk of dropping out.

Overall, we observed and learned about the high degree of autonomy that exists in schools in the Netherlands. As reported in the OECD's Education Policy Outlook on the Netherlands in 2014, "Schools are highly autonomous on matters related to resource allocation, curriculum and assessment as compared to other OECD countries."

All schools have choice in curriculum delivery and school concepts. There is a lot of freedom of choice for students, teachers and administration.

Pedagogy

- How teachers interact with students
- Understanding student's perspective
- Professional judgment



We engaged in professional dialogue around well-being and pedagogy with educational researchers, teachers and students at the KPZ Teacher Education University in Zwolle.

We also met with representatives from Nivoz, a non-profit educational organization in the Netherlands. Through their approach on pedagogy, they focus on encouraging young people to discover and develop their own characters, talents and possibilities with a goal to helping them develop into self-reliant adults who “envision their place in society in a responsive and responsible connection with themselves, others and the world.”

Overall, there was a focus on the importance of how teachers relate to and interact with their students, and understanding the student perspective, as well as the value of teachers using their professional judgment and tapping into their own intuition and lived experiences.

Primary Education

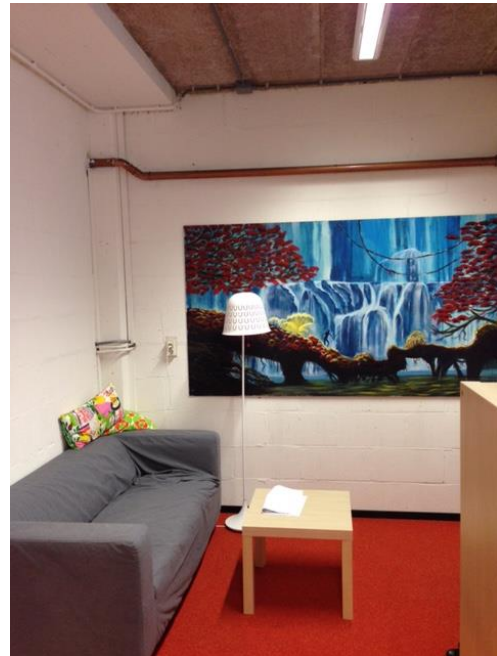
- Self-directed, independent learning
- Flexible learning
- Welcoming learning environment

We also observed and studied a few primary programs. Among our learnings were:

- Students participate in a high level of independent, self-directed learning, particularly at the beginning of the day. Students were highly engaged with technology, using it to sign themselves in and to select learning activities.
- The arrival time itself was flexible for students
- Parent engagement was visible in the school. The school was visibly open and welcoming for families.

Culture of Well-Being

- “Positive, secure and predictable school environment”
- Prioritize social and emotional development
- Parent engagement



The theme of well-being ran throughout our discussions, school visits, presentations and meetings. -

At the secondary school in Zwolle with a special program for students at risk of leaving school early, their approach was articulated around a focus on well-being. “Only when a student feels comfortable in the school and themselves and other respects, there is room for cognitive development.”

They:

- Prioritize social and emotional development as a first step
- Work closely with parents/guardians in supporting students
- Focus on creating “positive, secure and predictable school environments”

The picture above is of a quiet room that was available for students who needed to access a space like this throughout the day. The space was designed for the purpose of supporting student well-being. We continued to learn about the clear link between well-being and engagement, and the intentional and visible focus on mental health, well-being and happiness. There was a priority placed on building relationships, positive learning environments, resiliency, engagement and identifying student needs early.

Next Steps

- Superintendent of Education, Well-Being and Engagement

In December, the Director announced an [organizational update](#). As part of that update, we created a new position – Superintendent of Well-Being and Engagement. The creation of this position was influenced by what we learned and discussed in the Netherlands. This position will help to promote and support well-being as a priority throughout our system and make the connection between engagement and well-being.

Next Steps



In addition, that learning influenced the theme for Quest 2017, when we will focus on Student Well-Being: A Collective Responsibility. We look forward to the discussions that will take place at Quest in November when we have deeper discussions around how to foster and promote positive well-being among students.

We will continue to look at ways to develop this relationship so that we can continue to learn from our colleagues in the Netherlands and further our own work when it comes to student well-being. We will continue to strive to position York Region District School board as a leader in the province when it comes to advancing student achievement and well-being.