



NNDSB Mental Health and Addiction Strategy

2022 - 2025



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Introduction

The Near North District School Board (NNDSB) recognizes that mental health and well-being are fundamental to student success and effect academic achievement as well as social and emotional development. Students, staff, and families have endured many challenges and disruptions from COVID-19, resulting in increased negative impacts on mental health and well-being^{1,2}. Equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQ+, and other diverse communities were particularly impacted and are at the greatest risk of developing significant mental health struggles^{3,4}.

Student mental health and well-being is a key component in the Ministry of Education's *Plan to Catch Up* to support the learning recovery of Ontario's students. The NNDSB's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy is intended to be a roadmap to navigate the recovery from COVID-19's impact on student mental health and well-being.

NNDSB's 2022 – 2025 Mental Health and Addictions Strategy builds upon the previous strategy and is informed by local and provincial data and stakeholder consultation including NNDSB staff, community partners, student and parent voice, the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), and the First Nations Advisory Committee (FNAC). The Mental Health and Addictions Strategy aligns with and

supports the NNDSB's commitment to Excellence in: Teaching and Learning, Innovation, Relationships, and Communication.

Mission

The NNDSB Mental Health and Addiction Strategy will increase awareness, build capacity, and promote sustainable, evidence-based approaches with a focus on equity and diversity while continuing to maintain strong connections with community partners for a coordinated response. A student-centered, strengths-based, identify affirming, relationship-based, and trauma-informed approach to student mental health and well-being will help all students to reach their full potential. A measurement-based care approach will be used to collect, develop, and interpret data to inform planning and evaluate the effectiveness of mental health programming.

Culturally responsive services will embed into all mental health services and programming the recommendations of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action (2012)* and the *National Inquiry into MMIWG- Reclaiming Power and Place Report (2021)*. We recognize and embrace students' and families' rights to culture in the development of wellness plans that seek to achieve the outcomes of **Hope, Purpose, Belonging**, and **Meaning** as identified by the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework.

Vision

Our students will thrive in mentally healthy classrooms that have an intentional focus on supporting the well-being of students and developing their sense of belonging in their school community. Our vision is to equip all students with evidence-based strategies to support their social, emotional, and mental well-being as they encounter challenges throughout life. All students will be empowered to identify their needs and seek appropriate support. Clear referral pathways to support within the board and in the community will ensure that students have access to the appropriate mental health supports where and when they need it.

We value:

1. Collaboration with families in support of their children’s mental health and well-being.
2. Evidence-based and outcome informed approaches.
3. Community Partnerships.
4. Equity in our diverse educational community and being accountable for the success and well-being of all.
5. Student voice to inform and guide our work
6. Our staff, who play a vital role in promoting and supporting student mental health. We are committed to deepening their knowledge, understanding, and capacity to support all students.

Our Strategy

Mental Health and Well-Being

“Everyone has mental health. Although everyone’s understanding of it might change according to their cultural background, it might be helpful to think about mental health as a range or spectrum. On one end is good mental health. On the other, is poor mental health. We all move along this continuum, and all of us struggle with poor mental health at times, depending on what’s happening in our lives and other factors.”

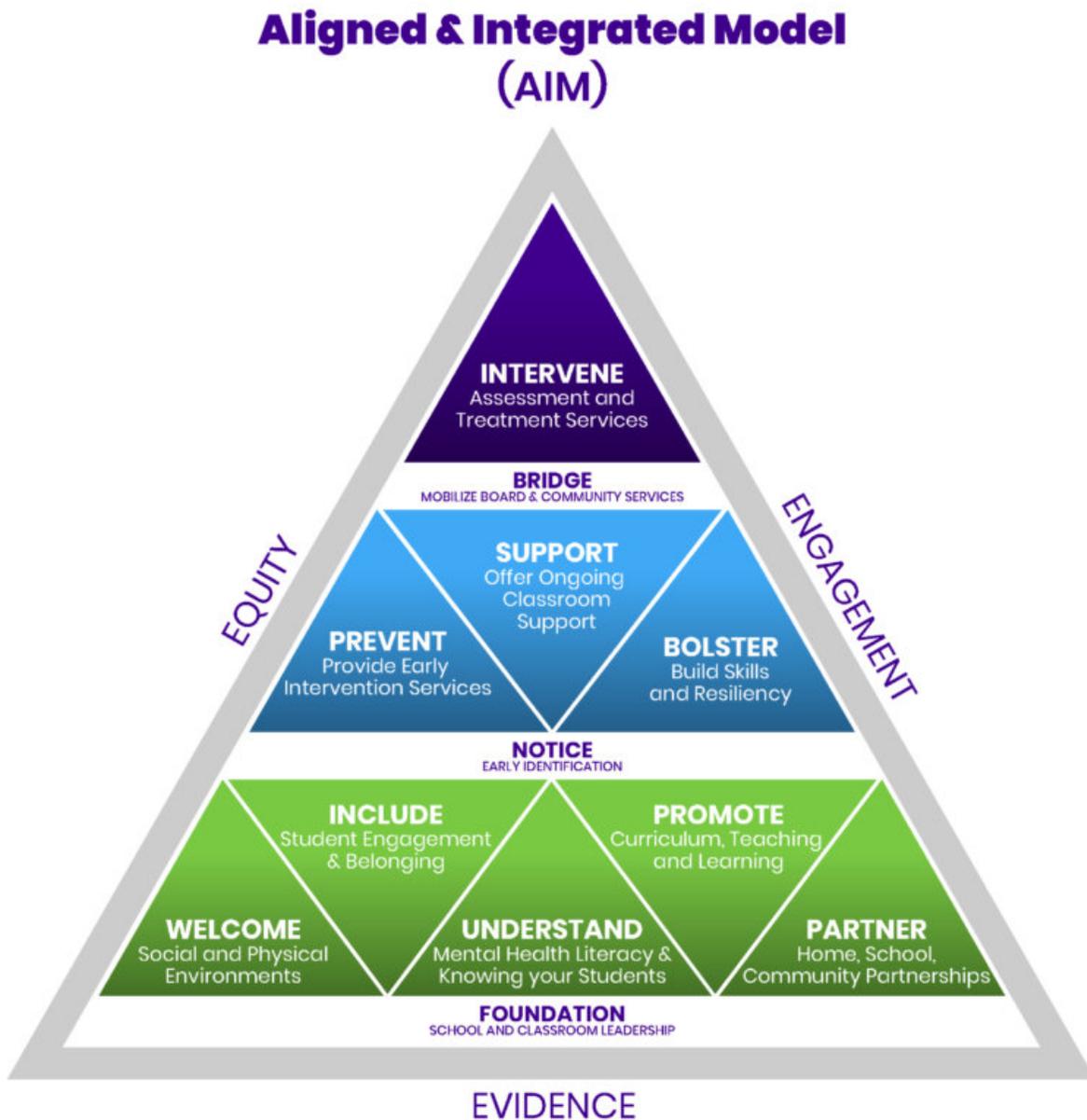
School Mental Health Ontario, (2022) 5.

We can consider well-being to be a positive sense of self/spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs are being met. These four interconnected elements are critical to human development. Well-being in early years and school settings is about supporting children and students to become more resilient, so that they can make positive, healthy choices to support learning and achievement, now and in the future.



Multi-Tiered System of Support

Mental Health Support at the Near North District School Board is structured on the AIM (Aligned and Integrated Model) developed by School Mental Health Ontario, a provincial implementation support team that helps school districts enhance student mental health using evidence-based strategies and services. This is a 3-tier approach to mental health promotion, early identification, prevention, and intervention services.



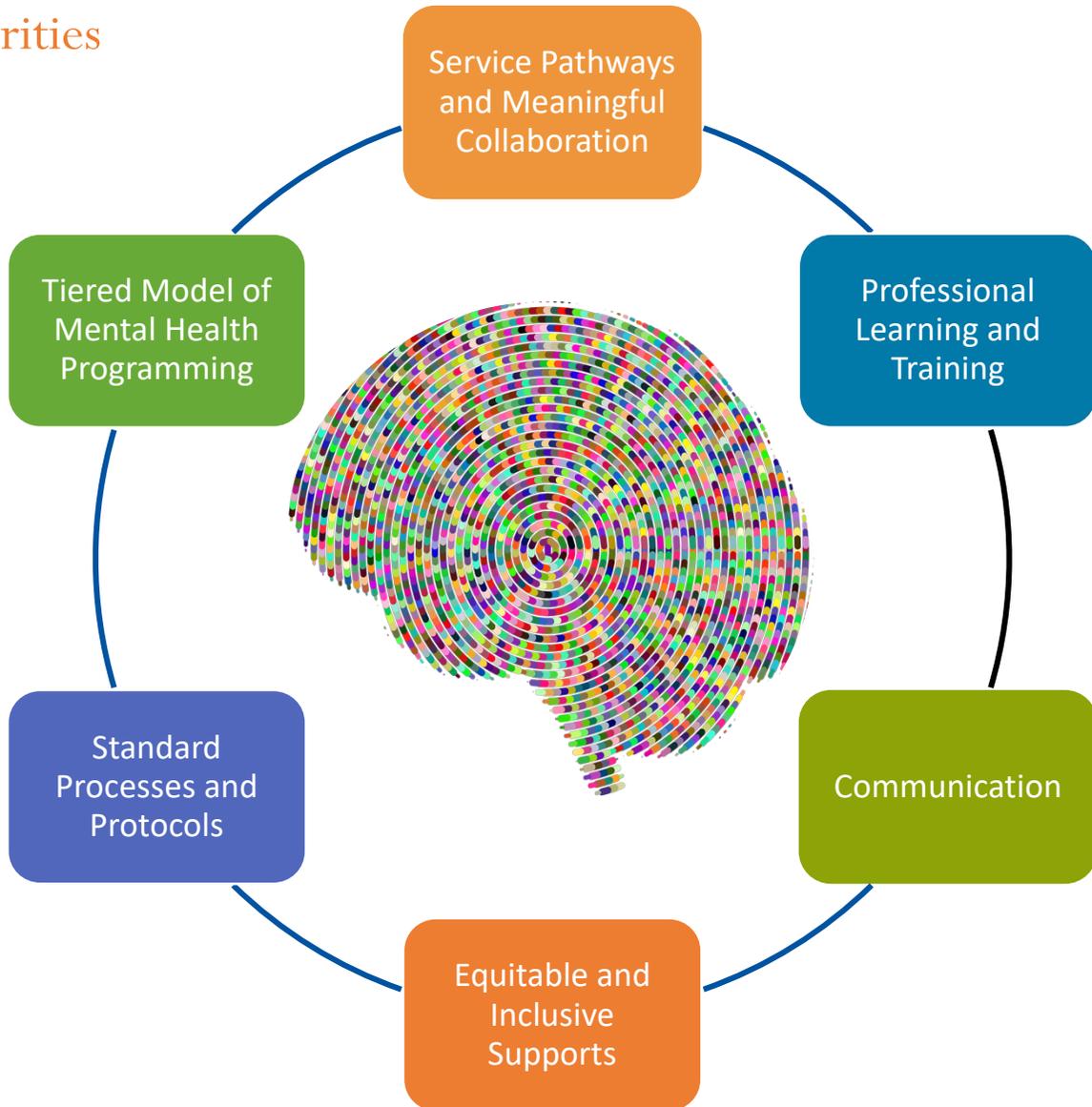
Tier 1: Promotion (Good for all). This is the foundational work done in classrooms and schools to create welcoming and inclusive environments that support the development of skills that promote well-being for all our students. This is where most of the mental health work in schools is done using programs such as SNAP (Stop Now and Plan), Kids Have Stress Too, MindUp, Learning to Breathe, and The Zones of Regulation.

Tier 2: Prevention (Necessary for some). The focus in this tier is on prevention and early intervention for students who need additional support. School mental health professionals provide intervention services, such as small groups and structured psychotherapy at this level.

Tier 3: Intervention (Essential for few). This tier supports students requiring more intensive assessment and intervention services. While it will always be necessary for schools to provide some level of tier 3 services, at the school level our role is to help students to access appropriate community or health services and to provide ongoing care while students are at school.



Priorities



1. **Service Pathways and Meaningful Collaboration.** Best outcomes for students and families are ensured through collaboration with community partners to develop clear processes for accessing mental health services within the school board and in the broader community.
 - Clearly identified internal and external pathways for mental health support and services.
 - Ensure students receive timely and responsive, evidence-based prevention and early intervention services at school and in the community.

- Enhance system coordination and access to mental health services.
- Regular communication and meetings with partner agencies to solidify partnerships and maintain clear service pathways.
- Open communication with partners to share trends, needs, and successes in program delivery and student wellness.
- Increase the mental health team to meet increased demand, as funding permits.
- Our partnership with Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca, Community Counseling Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association, Indigenous Friendship Centre, and the Mental Health and Addiction Nurses (MHAN) in schools will continue, with enhanced pathways to care.
- Collaborate with community partners in the co-facilitation of programming.
- Tiered model of mental health programming that is evidence-based and data-informed.
- Alignment of best practices with community partners to address student mental health in a complimentary and unified approach.
- Alignment with School and Board Improvement Plans for Safety and Well-Being.

2. Professional Learning and Training. Prepare staff for supporting student mental health and well-being with training that is appropriate for their roles.

- Professional learning will be provided to all staff and differentiated based on the needs of the employee groups
- Allocate training and staff meeting time each year to build capacity among staff to promote positive social-emotional outcomes among students.
- Educational and professional learning materials used within the classroom, school, community, and employee groups will be evidence-based.
- Be strategic and coordinated in providing training for consistent uptake and sustainable implementation of programming.
- Education and resources will be provided to support caring conditions for learning and mentally healthy schools.

- Scale-up prevention education with educators through professional development and mentoring for implementing social-emotional skill development in the classroom.

3. Communication. Clear and timely communication with students, families, staff, and system partners to ensure cohesive and effective connections and pathways.

- Review and update the NNDSB’s mental health SharePoint and board website with pertinent mental health program information and resources.
- Develop awareness of board mental health services available through promotion.
- Use of different modalities to deliver Mental Health Literacy and help seeking information to students, staff, and the community (ex. Newsletters, social media, class presentations).

4. Equitable and Inclusive Supports. These “help to address the barriers that reinforce marginalization and oppression and ensure that school Mental Health services are culturally responsive to the unique Mental Health and well-being needs of each student and family.” (SMHO)

- A trauma-informed and equity-based lens will be an essential component of the professional development of staff.
- All internal Mental Health policies, initiatives, resources, and projects will be reviewed with an anti-oppressive lens to ensure equity and cultural responsiveness is considered.
- Principles of accountability, education, and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action will be embedded into service delivery and design.
- Continued partnership with the NNDSB’s Indigenous Education lead around culturally responsive Mental Health supports for students and families.
- Continued partnership with the NNDSB’s Well-Being and Equity Lead around equitable and inclusive Mental Health supports for students and families.
- A culturally responsive lens will be used to select strategies for mental health promotion and services.

- System-wide initiatives will expand social emotional learning programs that are identity affirming and culturally responsive.
- Support specific populations in our community who may require more or unique mental health and well-being support and services.
- Build our knowledge of Indigenous approaches to mental health well-being so that we can provide support that honours individual culture and traditions.
- Explore ways to amplify student voice on issues of well-being at the school and board level to inform programming and planning.

“The power of student voice puts the power of change in our hands.” – Cecilia Darling, NNDSB Student Trustee

5. **Standard Processes and Protocols.** This will ensure consistent service delivery and clear communication of Mental Health procedures for all staff to maintain a high quality of service.
 - Review and revise protocols between community partners to ensure consistency with how supports are accessed internally and externally for students.
 - Review and revise the Suicide Risk Management Best Practice Guideline.
 - Review and revise the Crisis Response Team (CRT) Protocol.
 - Review and revise the Monitoring and Reporting Student Attendance Guideline.
 - Review and further develop standard operating procedures for the Mental Health Program.
 - Develop clear processes around privacy and information sharing both internally and externally for School Mental Health services.
6. **Tiered Model of Mental Health Programming** that is evidence-based and data informed. The tier model allows for effective design and monitoring of mental health services at the system and school level. Evidence-based tools and approaches helps ensure positive outcomes.

- Develop system-wide model of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program implementation that emphasizes fidelity to implementation science and sustainability.
- Increase Tier 1 supports available in schools and classrooms to meet the increasing mental health needs by teaching all students social emotional skills to cope with life's challenges.
- Professional staff serving students in Tier 2 will use evidence-based practices and programs that focus on early intervention strategies to develop social-emotional learning skills.
- Professional staff in Tier 3 will use individualized evidence-based interventions to meet the specific needs of students.
- Use of data to identify trends, needs, and areas of inefficiency to inform the selection of programs and resources and program delivery.
- Explore and select outcome measurement tools to evaluate the effectiveness of mental health programming at all 3 Tiers.



References

1. Mental Health Commission of Canada (2020). [Lockdown life: Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth in Canada.](#)
2. Canadian Association of Mental Health, (2022). [The 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey.](#)
3. Mental Health Commission of Canada, (2021). [Shining a Light on Mental Health in Black Communities.](#)
4. Canadian Mental Health Association, The University of British Columbia, Maru/Matchbox, Mental Health Foundation, & The Agenda Collaborative, (2020). [Mental Health Impacts of Covid 19: Wave 2.](#)
5. School Mental Health Ontario, (2022). [Understanding Mental Health.](#)