



**Together for Mental Health:
Everyone, Everyday**

**Mental Health Strategy
2023-2026**

dcdsb.ca/MentalHealth

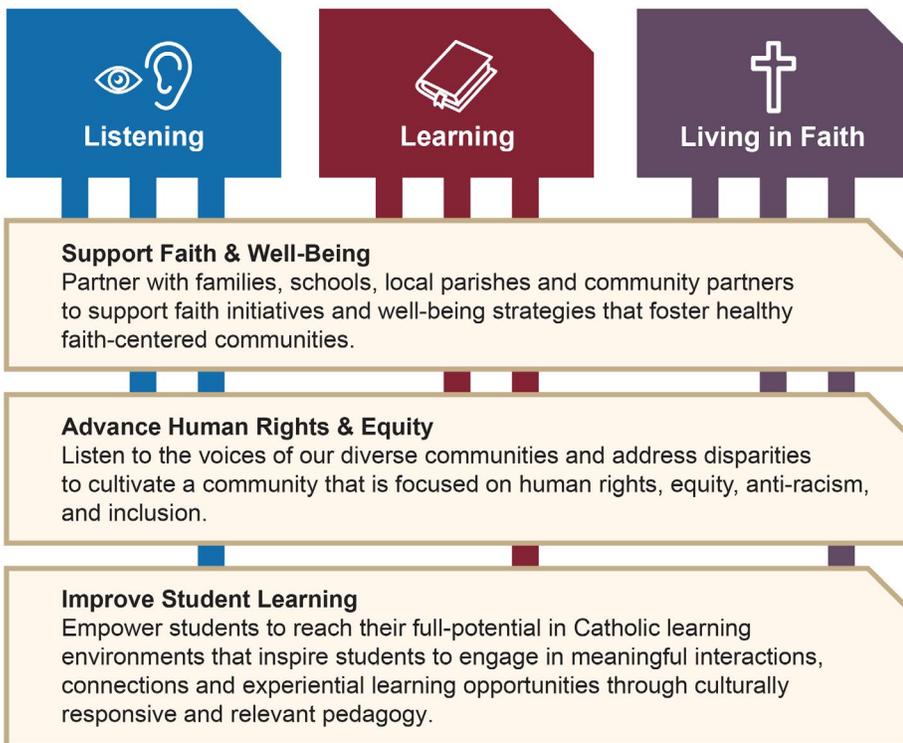


**DURHAM CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**
Learning and Living in Faith

Our Commitments

As a Catholic learning community, we believe that mental health and well-being are essential components of inclusion and academic achievement, hence we are committed to:

- Upholding the worth and dignity of every person
- Sharing responsibility for creating collaborative and inclusive learning communities
- Recognizing the inextricable link between student mental health and student achievement as the foundation for cultivating productive, well-rounded contributors to our community
- The right of all children to attend school and reach their full potential
- Developing our system's capacity to understand and support the mental health and well-being of all learners
- Focusing on the implementation of evidence-based/evidence-informed programs and services to support all learners
- Engaging with our community mental health and health care partners in enhancing mentally healthy schools
- Providing a safe, caring, inclusive learning environments so that all children and youth can succeed



Together for Mental Health reflects the Durham Catholic District School Board's mission, vision, values. It also aligns with the board's multi-year strategic plan, *Inspire 2026*, which includes Listening, Learning and Living in faith as foundational processes to support the strategic priorities of:

- Supporting Faith and Well-Being
- Advancing Human Rights and Equity
- Improving Student Learning

Through this strategy, we are committed to supporting the goals within these priority areas.



Mental Health Within the Context of Catholic Education

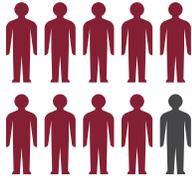
Here at the Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB), we believe that every human being has inherent human dignity and is made in the image and likeness of God. This fundamental concept is at the core of all that we do in Catholic schools. Promoting the well-being and positive mental health of all students to reach their God-given potential is a gospel mandate and a moral imperative for Catholic Schools. **(Institute for Catholic Education – Well-Being from a Catholic Perspective: Addressing Mental Health Literacy within Religion and Family Life Programs, Spring 2020).**

At DCDSB, the importance of nurturing the relationship between our students' mental health and their faith is vital to student achievement and success. Faith can serve as a protective factor and can also enhance one's sense of self. Our commitment to well-being and faith will be shown through our actions, initiatives, and messaging. With a focus on relationships, we will serve through acceptance, compassion, equity, and empowerment to help eliminate the disproportionate struggles experienced by some and instill a sense of hope for all.

Mental Health — Provincial Snapshot

What the data tells us

Belonging and Safety



Amongst students in Grades 7-12, 91% reported feeling safe in school

74% stated they felt a strong sense of belonging in school

Mental Health and the Effects of the Pandemic



39% of students cited feeling “very much” or “extremely” negatively affected by the pandemic

Overall Well-Being of Ontario Students

32%

Reported experiencing an elevated level of stress or pressure in their lives

18%

Reported that they had seriously contemplated suicide

42%

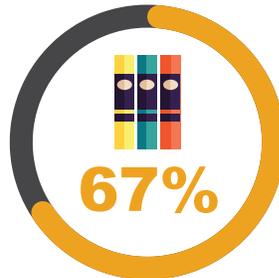
Report that in the past year, they didn’t know where to turn when they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem they were experiencing

SickKids

COVID-19 Pandemic and State of Students’ Mental Health

Research from SickKids Hospital (2021) found that a significant number of children and youth experienced declining mental health during the pandemic — “overall, children were faring mostly worse, and occasionally better, compared to their pre-pandemic selves”

Mental Health Initiatives



67% of students have knowledge and awareness of the mental health supports and initiatives in place at their schools

82.2% of respondents were not involved in a mental health leadership initiative at school, but 70% of respondents indicated an interest

Students’ Top Priorities for School Mental Health

- 1** Educator Mental Health Literacy
- 2** Equity and School Mental Health
- 3** Student Engagement

Students suggested that identity-affirming, student centred programming is needed to address barriers and create more support and resources.

“Everyone getting the help they need (is) not everyone getting the same amount of help because everyone has different situations and experiences”.

—Student (#HearNow ON)

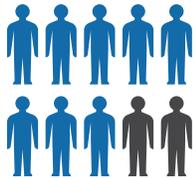
Data on this page is found in the following sources:

1. #HearNow ON: Ontario Student Perspectives on School Mental Health, (School Mental Health Ontario, 2021)
2. Mostly Worse, Occasionally Better: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the mental health of Canadian Children and Adolescents (SickKids, 2021)
3. The Well Being of Ontario Students (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2021)

Mental Health — DCDSB Snapshot

What the data tells us

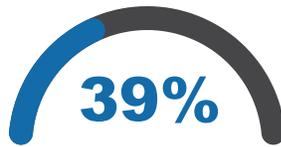
Pride and The Future



According to students surveyed, 80% feel that they have a lot to be proud of

66% of students surveyed are optimistic about their future and what it entails

Mood and Anxiety



of students surveyed felt nervous/anxious or on edge most days in the last two weeks; 29% felt depressed most days in the last week

COVID-19 Pandemic

State of Students' Mental Health

51%

of students reported that their anxiety has increased because of COVID-19

60%

of students reported that their loneliness has increased because of COVID-19

DCDSB Parent Priorities for Mental Health

1

Whole school/class programs and Initiatives focused on creating mentally healthy schools and classrooms

2

Early intervention to provide focused support to those with increasing mental health concerns

Number of Staff Trained to Date

330

Applied Suicide Intervention Training

730

safeTALK Suicide Prevention Course

964

Mental Health First Aid¹

Top Reasons for Referral to School-Based Mental Health Services

(September 2021 - June 2022)

Elementary School

1

Anxiety

2

Learning Difficulties

Secondary School

1

Anxiety

2

Depression/Low Mood

1003

Number of DCDSB students who received mental health intervention from a regulated mental health professional in the 2021-2022 school year

“Students need to be taught strategies for coping with mental health and (be able to) talk openly about mental health in the classroom”.

—Parent (DCDSB Special Education Review)

Data on this page is found in the following sources:

1. Administrators Mental Health and Well-being Survey (March 2022)
2. Compass Survey of DCDSB Students (University of Waterloo, 2021)
3. Special Education Review-Parent/Guardian Feedback Survey (October 2022)

Four Key Themes Emerged Though the Data

The following themes were used to develop our strategic priorities:

1

Working towards our “new normal”: While the overall long-term impact on the health and well-being of students is unknown, it is clear that during the current “pandemic recovery phase” participation in full school life, as well as a strong focus on relationships, connections and support will be extremely important to help mitigate the mental health impacts experienced by many students and the disproportionate struggles experienced by some.

2

Focusing on student engagement, leadership, and agency: Students have expressed a strong desire to become more engaged in mental health initiatives in their school and board so that they can play a more active role in wellness promotion. Young people have a unique perspective and powerful voice in this work.

3

Emphasizing the importance of staff well-being: Just as our students’ health and well-being has been impacted by the pandemic, staff too have endured, and are recovering from the impacts of the past few years. Staff have been called upon to be frontline workers during these unprecedented times and in part have been the stability and consistency for our students in a very unpredictable period. Supporting our staff in building their own social-emotional competencies and resilience is a first step in building that of our students.

4

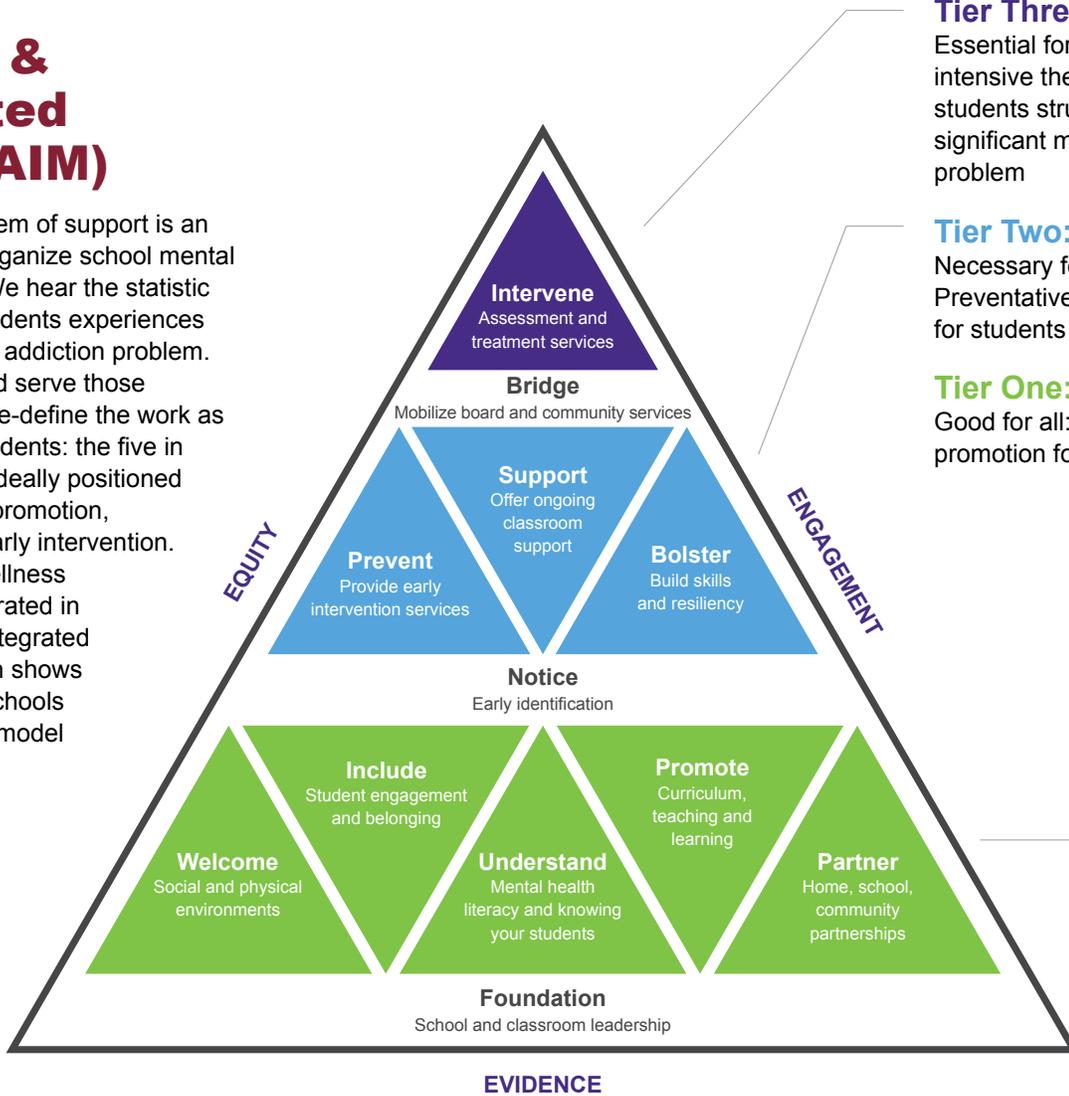
Highlighting the intersectionality of equity, culture, and mental health: Our students and families come from diverse backgrounds, and we must ensure that all members of our school community are given equitable opportunities for success within a culture of high expectations for learning. We are compelled to engage, in order to learn more about available and needed identity-affirming mental health supports; to amplify perspectives of young people and communities who are racialized and marginalized; and to respond to student mental health needs through identity-affirming and culturally responsive approaches.

Our Strategy

The strategic priorities outlined below will support the broader goals of **Inspire 2026**, DCDSB's multi-year Strategic Plan. Our priorities align with School Mental Health Ontario's Strategy (2022-2025) and is based on the three-tiered approach in the Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) from School Mental Health Ontario.

Aligned & integrated model (AIM)

A multi-tiered system of support is an effective way to organize school mental health activities. We hear the statistic that one in five students experiences a mental health or addiction problem. We care about and serve those students. But we re-define the work as being about all students: the five in five. Schools are ideally positioned for mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention. This upstream, wellness orientation is illustrated in the Aligned and Integrated model (AIM) which shows how our work in schools is organized. The model has three tiers:



Tier Three:

Essential for a few: More intensive therapy for students struggling with a significant mental health problem

Tier Two:

Necessary for some: Preventative interventions for students at risk

Tier One:

Good for all: Mental health promotion for all students

As a foundation for sustainable school mental health, we will continue to focus on **Organizational Conditions** by:

- Communicating a **shared language** that is clear, consistent, and non-stigmatizing for all staff, students, parents, guardians and caregivers
- Providing **system-wide communication** of this strategy, including our commitments and priorities
- Monitoring and measurement of our strategy and outcomes to support **continuous quality improvement**

2023-2026 Strategic Priorities

1

Amplify the promotive and protective influence of schools by creating culturally responsive, mentally healthy schools and classrooms.

This work is primarily focused on the **Tier One** level of intervention. Educators and school support staff are well-positioned to promote positive mental health and do the work at this level.

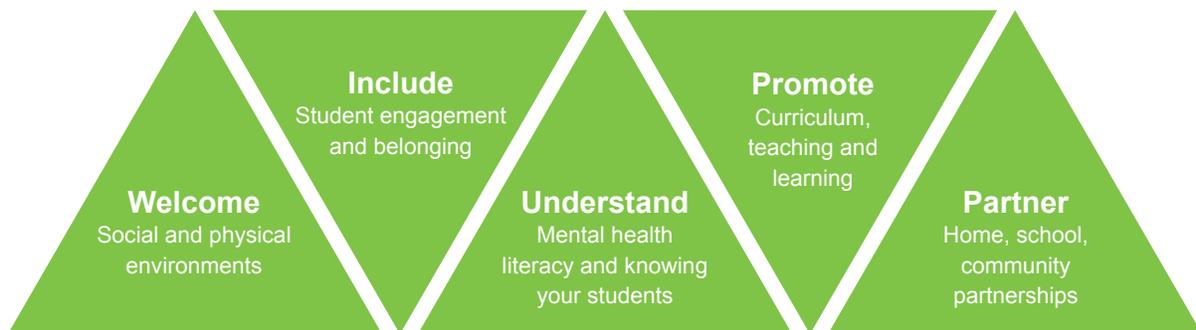


Over the next three years, we will continue to focus on:

- Supporting school and system leaders and school staff to create culturally responsive, mentally healthy schools and classrooms.
- Wellness promotion and uptake of evidence-informed, culturally responsive social-emotional learning.
- Building student mental health literacy, with an emphasis on student engagement, leadership, and agency.
- Promoting staff well-being and ensuring that staff have the tools they need to nurture their own mental health and in turn that of the students.

Tier One:

Good for all: Mental health promotion for all students



Foundation

School and classroom leadership

2

Identify and address emerging and escalating student mental health problems.

This work is primarily focused on the **Tier Two** level of intervention. All staff have a role to play in noticing and identifying when a student may be experiencing mental health concerns. Support at this level may take place in classrooms, small groups or individually and will often focus on skill-building or brief clinical interventions. School support staff and school mental health professionals are well-positioned to do work at this level.

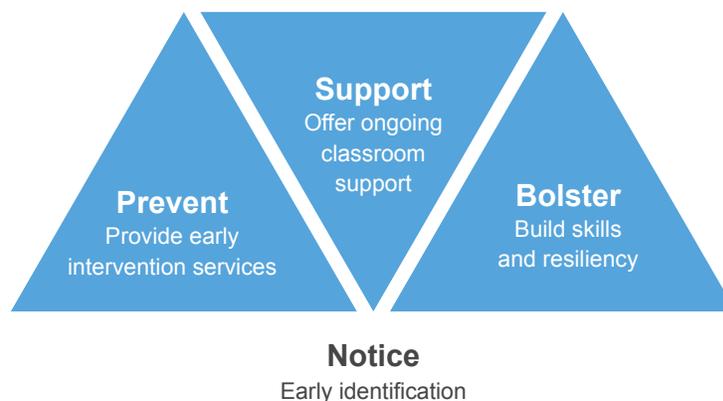


Over the next three years, we will continue to focus on:

- Building role-specific capacity for noticing and responding when students are experiencing emerging signs of mental health concerns.
- Increasing the use of evidence based, stepped care protocols for supporting students with mild-to-moderate mental health needs.

Tier Two:

Necessary for some: Preventative interventions for students at risk



3

Mobilize focused support for those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and/or those with more serious mental health and addiction concerns.

This work is primarily focused on the **Tier Three** level of intervention and usually involves regulated school mental health professionals. To do this work effectively, ongoing professional learning is necessary, aligned, and responsive to the needs of our diverse community.



Over the next three years, we will continue to focus on:

- Increasing the capacity of school mental health professionals to respond to the changing mental health needs of our students, particularly those with more serious mental health and addiction concerns, using evidence-based approaches.
- Building knowledge of culturally responsive supports and best practices that serve to disrupt inequities.

Tier Three:

Essential for a few: More Intensive therapy for students struggling with a significant mental health problem



Bridge

Mobilize board and community services

4

Build and sustain strong safety nets through family and system collaboration.

This work is also primarily focused on the **Tier Three** level of intervention and involves collaborative approaches with community partners and parents, guardians, and caregivers, recognizing the crucial role and valued expertise that each contributes. Articulating clear pathways to care will ensure the right service at the right time.

Over the next three years, we will continue to focus on:

- Building and maintaining collaborative relationships with community partners, including culturally relevant mental health supports and initiatives.
- Ongoing work in supporting pathways to, from and through service.
- Training and protocols in suicide prevention and postvention.
- Supporting parents, guardians and caregivers of children who are struggling with mental health problems, through capacity-building and facilitating connections to more intensive supports.



Acknowledgements

Together for Mental Health: Everyone, Everyday 2023-2026 was developed in consultation with a diverse Mental Health Steering Committee, as well as staff, students, parents, guardians and caregivers, and community partners.

For further information visit dcdsb.ca/MentalHealth

