Key Principles and Strategies for K-12 Mental Health Promotion in Schools

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BRITISH COLUMBIA | Ministry of Education

Key Principles and Strategies for K-12 Mental Health Promotion in Schools

Introduction

The K-12 system continues to demonstrate great resilience, flexibility, and innovation to meet student, school, and community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and response. It is important to acknowledge the important roles of adults throughout the system in supporting students to process their COVID-19 experiences, and build resiliency, skills and knowledge that contribute to their overall well-being. This resource was developed as a supplement to the district-focused resources in the K-12 Recovery Plan to support district and school-based staff, families, and students as they prepare for the start of the 2021/22 school year. The return to school in the Fall provides opportunity for reconnection and a focus on holistic health promotion with intentional actions that address systemic inequities.

Objectives

In partnership with the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), the Ministry of Education initiated a Mental Health School Start-up Working Group with membership from education, mental and public health, and government partners. This working group reviewed data and research (completed and in progress), on mental health impacts of COVID-19 and the pandemic response and literature on mental health promotion to identify key principles, strategies, recommend actions, and resources to support school start-up 2021/22 and the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

General information on mental health and specific information on the mental health impacts of COVID-19 is included at the end of this resource as background information. The document begins with Key Principles that expand on the elements of the Ministry's *Mental Health in Schools Strategy* and follows with strategies, recommended actions, and resources to support mental health and well-being with a school-based focus. Please use discretion and professional judgement in applying principles and strategies that will most benefit your school communities, classrooms, students, colleagues, and yourselves.

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Key Principles

The following four key principles apply to all elements of the *MHiS Strategy* and are intended to provide a general framework for planning and implementing Fall 2021 school opening processes.

Key Principles

Cultural Responsiveness and Humility

Proportionate Responses and Supports

Trauma Informed Practices

Strengths Based Approaches

Cultural Responsiveness and Humility Key Principle: *Demonstrate cultural humility by reflecting on your own and systemic cultural biases when choosing actions/resources to support mental health as we return to our school communities in September.*

Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection to help understand personal and systemically conditioned biases and to develop respectful processes and relationships. It involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a life-long learner when it comes to understanding another's experience. Cultural safety is about fostering a climate where Indigenous Peoples and peoples of all cultures are recognized, respected and reflected without discrimination. School connectedness is impacted by implicit bias and privilege, expectations, sense of belonging and identity, cultural relevance, Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, connection to communities, cultures of reflective practice, and many other factors.

Actions	Resources
Everyone: • Practice awareness and sensitivity regarding the complex and devastating history that pandemics have had on many Indigenous communities. • Make a personal commitment to cultural responsiveness and humility and set goals to stay accountable.	• Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action • First Nations Health Authority Cultural Safety and Humility

• Humbly acknowledge oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. • Engage in self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships. • Learn about and support Indigenous language revitalization in your community. • Recognize and honour the traditional territories and communities among which you live, work, and those of your students. School and District Leadership: • Actively participate in respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the K-12 system. • Establish structures and processes for shared decision making with Indigenous peoples. • Consult with local First Nations to recognize and incorporate First Nations language of the land and culture into 2021-22 school ceremonies. • Consult with MNBC and local Métis Chartered Communities to incorporate Métis language and culture. • Deliver ongoing authentic in-service and professional development for all school district staff that focuses on enhancing Indigenous student achievement as well as integrating Indigenous and culturally-specific world views and perspectives into learning environments. Educators: • Participate and support student participation in First Nations and Métis community events.	• Equity in Action Project • Métis Nation BC Health & Wellness Newsletter • Nahanee Creative • Métis-specific Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Tool

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Proportionate Responses and Supports Key Principle: *Use curiosity and inquiry to understand how others have experienced or felt in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, how they would describe their mental health, and what services and supports they need or want.*

Proportionate response is the concept that supports and services should be provided in proportion to the impact or needs of the individual. Not everyone has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way; some adults, youth and children have felt deep negative impacts and others may have felt net positive impacts. Vulnerabilities and inequities existing pre-pandemic and systemic barriers play an influential role in a person's experience.

Actions	Resources
School and District Leadership: • Use pivot table data in your school district Mental Health dashboards to identify students that may have additional support needs.	• Equitas • *erase*: Racism • Resilience BC

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Actions	Resources

o Contact your district SharePoint designate with any questions.
• Review attendance data to identify students who have not been connected to school, chronically absent or those studying remotely for the first time in 2020/21 and develop specific plans to connect with these students to support their return to school.
  o Contact Education Analytics for support if needed.
• Develop actions to support the needs of specific populations of students identified through the data in your school district Mental Health dashboard.
  o Contact Education Analytics for support if needed.
• Provide opportunities for school staff to connect with professionals who have knowledge and experience supporting the mental health of students with disabilities and diverse abilities.
Educators:
• Reach out to parents/caregivers of students with disabilities and diverse abilities to acknowledge their strengths and challenges in coping with changed, often limited, supports and services during the pandemic.
	• A Toolkit for Raising Attendance Rates of First Nations Students in British Columbia (Draft 2020)

Key Principles

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Trauma Informed Practices Key Principle: *Use a trauma informed lens when interacting with students, colleagues, and families.*

Trauma-informed practice means integrating an understanding of past and current experiences of violence and trauma into all aspects of school life. The goal of trauma-informed systems is to avoid re-traumatizing students and adults and support safety, choice, and control to promote healing. Trauma informed practices support all students and adults whether they have experienced trauma or not.

Traumatic experiences are always stressful, but stressors are not always traumatic. Trauma is not expressed the same way for all students nor are the experiences that have led to trauma.

Actions	Resources
Everyone: • Take time to create and ensure shared understanding when teaching or discussing trauma, anxiety and stress. The language or words we use are influenced by our cultural and contextual biases and often assume shared meaning. School and District Leadership: • Embed trauma informed practices into administrative planning for a return to school – ensuring that communication related to changes in health and safety plans acknowledges trauma and stress experienced by staff and students during the pandemic. Educators:	• Routes to Safety • Stress vs Trauma • Trauma Informed Practice: Compassionate Learning Communities Framework • MCFD Trauma Informed Practice Guide • Adopting a Trauma-Informed-Informed

• Reflect on pandemic experiences to create a trauma-informed classroom in the Fall, e.g., acknowledge that some students and families, especially students with disabilities, experienced increased stress due to absence of supports – ask questions and validate experiences i.e. "what was different for you and your family?", "what would have helped to make that time less stressful"; ensure strength-focused language if discussing why people might choose not to be vaccinated.
• These four strategies are fundamental to building a trauma-informed classroom
  1. **Trauma awareness:** Being 'trauma aware' means that educators understand that the pandemic may have increased in levels of trauma for students that can influence how they learn, socialize and experience emotions in the classroom.
  2. **Safety and Trustworthiness:** Physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural safety are important to trauma-informed practice. By creating a safe classroom, educators build strong and trustworthy relationships that can support students who are living with trauma.
  3. **Choice, Collaboration and Connection:** Educators can create opportunities for choice and connection within the classroom to support students' strengths. The experience of choice, collaboration, and connection often involves educators inviting students to be active participants in the decisions that impact their student life.
  4. **Strengths-based and Coping Skills:** By promoting resiliency and coping skills in the classroom, educators can help students manage triggers related to past experiences of trauma and support healing and self-advocacy.
	[Approach for LGBTQ2S+ Youth](#)
	• Gender-based Violence Resources
	  o [Victoria Sexual Assault Centre](#)
	  o [BC Society of Transition Houses](#)
	  o [Battered Women's Support Services: Indigenous Women's Programs](#)
	  o [QMunity: LGBTQ2S+ Programs](#)
	  o [2-Spirit Collective: Urban Native Youth Association](#)

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[Strengths Based Approaches](#)

Strengths Based Approaches Key Principle: *Use strength-based approaches and practices that worked well during the pandemic response, highlighting successes and opportunities for growth.* Strengths-based approaches emphasize the strengths, capabilities and resources of students, educators, classrooms, schools, and communities. They are holistic approaches of combining instruction with support for the student's well-being. Strength-based perspectives are based on the belief that all students, educators, and communities have strengths, resources and the ability to recover from adversity. This perspective replaces an emphasis on problems, vulnerabilities, and deficits, while still acknowledging important individual and contextual risk and protective factors.

Actions	Resources
Everyone: • Engage students and colleagues in relational ways, supporting connection, that demonstrate positive attitudes about their dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities. • Create conditions and unique opportunities that enable educators and students to identify and reflect on strengths used during the pandemic and draw upon their strengths and capacity in ways that create meaningful and sustainable progression towards change and goals. • Provide and mobilize resources in ways that complements individuals' existing strengths and resources. • Identify and address social, personal, cultural and structural constraints to individuals' desired goals, growth and self-determination. • Ensure a growth mindset versus deficit-thinking, as it risks perpetuating inequities for students who have been more severely impacted by the pandemic.	• MindsetKit • Resilient Educator: Building a Growth Mindset for Teachers

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Strategies

The Strategies are aligned with specific elements of the *MHiS Strategy:* Compassionate Systems Leadership, Capacity Building, and Mental Health in the Classroom.

MHiS Strategy: Compassionate Systems Leadership

Compassionate systems leadership (CSL) in education is an approach that inspires transformation and best practices that invite K-12 administrators and educators to consider new system awareness tools and embed compassion in their work.

Compassionate Systems Leadership: *Respond mindfully and compassionately, taking time to clarify common understanding and perspectives and experiences as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
Everyone: • Build on the skills and practices of CSL in three interconnected domains: self (building a practice of personal reflection, mindfulness, and compassion), community (building authentic relationships that can support generative conversations), and the system (developing skills and capabilities to use tools that honour the complexity of the educational work that needs to be done). • Learn about and explore CSL tools, reflecting on how they can be applied personally, relationally and systemically as part of the 2021-22 school year opening: o Use the Ladder of Inference model to slow down, show curiosity, ask clarifying questions and ensure decision	• Compassionate Systems Leadership • Discover MDI • UBC: Growing Compassionate Systems Leadership: A Toolkit

making is based on facts and observations rather than based on biases, values and assumptions. ○ Use the Shifting the Burden approach to move from applying short-term, reactionary responses to problem solving to long-term fundamental solutions to address underlying conditions.	

Adult Well-Being: *Acknowledge the importance of adult well-being, provide opportunities for adults to reflect, connect and collaborate as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*
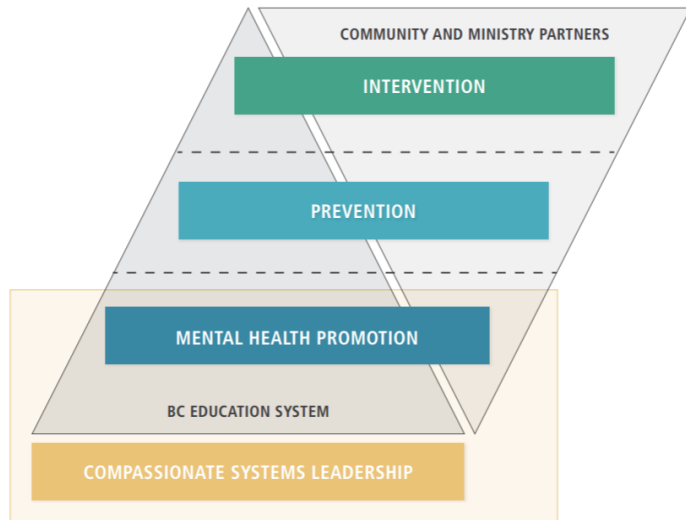
Actions	Resources
Everyone: • Recognize that adult mental health and well-being is an influential factor in supporting student well-being • Enhance opportunities and resources for educators' self-care. • Healthy coping strategies and programs are for everyone. • Create time and opportunities for maintaining and investing in collegial relationships both inside and outside of school, as well as with friends and family. • Where possible, identify and implement systemic actions that can support staff well-being. • Be aware of the well-being of parents and caregivers, particularly those of students with disabilities and diverse abilities who, during the pandemic may have experienced or be experiencing increase levels of stress.	• K-12 Staff Wellbeing • EdCan Network: Well at Work • Managing the mental health effects of COVID-19 in the workplace: A guide for employers • Addressing the mental health effects of COVID-19 in the workplace: A guide for workers • Kelty Mental Health: Fostering and Supporting Teacher and Staff Well-being

MHiS Strategy: Capacity Building

Capacity building is the process by which people, organizations and communities develop their capability over time through improvement of knowledge, skills, and approaches. Related to mental health promotion in schools, capacity building refers to both the growth of personal capacity and capability as well as school, district and overall system capacity and capability to ensure school environments support students' mental health and well-being.

As outlined in the *MHiS Strategy,* the BC education system takes a lead role in supporting the mental health and well-being of students and adults through mental health promotion, prevention and intervention. The system focuses it's resources and supports on universal mental health promotion with proportionate responses and supports to bolster prevention and pathways to care in collaboration with community and other ministry partners. This systemic response helps prevent mental health needs from becoming ongoing or lifelong issues.

Mental Health Literacy: Build your mental health literacy to know when to focus on mental health premotion, prevention and intervention as students return to in-person learning and interactions in the coming school year.

Actions	Resources
Everyone: • Develop knowledge and understanding of the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of wellbeing of individuals to promote wellness throughout the lifespan. • Model non-pathologizing or labeling language and focus on strengths and resiliencies and explore these topics with a critical lens. • Be intentional in choice of language or words – model MHL by describing behaviours, feelings, sensations rather than a broad term. E.g. "I feel nervous when I speak in front of a new group of peers, I can tell because my palms sweat, my chest feels tight and it is hard to remember my words" vs. "speaking in front of new peers makes me anxious". • Understand stress responses and explore how different students and adults in the system experienced this over the past school year. • Acknowledge your own feelings if a person brings up a topic you are uncomfortable discussing and refer them to the appropriate person. • Listen and encourage individuals to get support from mental health professionals when needed. • Support students to know who within the school they can go to for help. • Use established referral pathways to connect students and adults to prevention and intervention services and supports as needed. • Build family and parent/caregiver awareness of services and resources.	• Anxiety Canada: Anxiety in Youth • UBC Faculty of Education Mental Health Literacy • Mental Health Literacy • Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators (EASE) • Helping Schools (*Drug Literacy*) (University of Victoria) • Stop Wondering, Start Knowing • Kelty Mental Health: Mental Health Literacy Resources and Curriculum for the Classroom • BC Children's Kelty Mental Health: Our Approach to Supporting Schools • Foundry BC • BounceBack • BC Children's Kelty Mental Health Resource

School and District Leadership:	Centre - School Professionals Section
• Support the coordination and alignment of mental health promotion through the identification of school district level leadership. • Support the development of mental health literacy among school staff. Educators: • Use mental health literacy resources to develop the mental health literacy of students. Use curricular resources to support mental health instruction.	• BC Children's Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre - Resource Library for School Professionals • FNHA - Youth and COVID-19 Resources • FNHA - Mental Health and Wellness Resources for Youth

Social and Emotional Learning: *Co-construct safe spaces to have open conversations about mental health modeling and teaching social emotional skills and validating the experiences of others as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
• Develop a personal understanding of social emotional learning (SEL). • Feel and show empathy for others. • Model how to manage or regulate emotions. • Model how to set and achieve goals. • Ask questions, share learning resources and experiences when it is appropriate and comfortable to do so. • Model, foster and teach social emotional competencies through open conversations about feelings, responses and coping skills, validating others' experiences. • Consider implementing social emotional learning programs at the school and/or district levels. • Build capacity and social and emotional competencies and capacity in school staff through in-service and professional development and through supporting the well-being of staff.	• SEL Matters, Vancouver Early Years Partnership • Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) • Heart-Mind Online Resources for Educators • SEL Resource Finder (UBC) • Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource (School Mental Health Ontario) • Well-Being BC (also MHL and TIP) • SEL BC • Winona State University: Grounding Worksheet • Kelty Mental Health: Support Social Emotional Learning in Schools and Classrooms • North Vancouver School District: Social and Emotional Learning and Mental Health • Mediation Program	Urban Native Youth Association

Resilience: *Build competencies for resilience through scaffolded practice and play as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources

• Understand and communicate that being resilient doesn't make dealing with difficult or stressful situations easy or mean that you will not feel angry, sad, or worried during tough times, but it does mean that you will not feel as overwhelmed and will have better coping skills to handle stressful situations in healthy ways.
• Understand and communicate that resilience can be strengthened and nurtured through engagement and practice.
• Focus on strategies that address the seven integral and interrelated components of resilience:
    ○ Build **Competence**: Use inquiry to allow exploration of interests while building transferable skills and learning new things.
    ○ Build **Confidence**: Differentiate and provide scaffolding to support students with varying levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve success. Acknowledge successes.
    ○ Build **Connection**: Give opportunities for regular periods of undivided attention and listening. Pay attention to the social dynamics in the classroom and school community and foster connections and understanding between students and educators.
    ○ Build **Character**: Cultivate firm, fair, and consistent agreements in the classroom; use classroom management practices that promote responsibility and self-regulation over compliance.
    ○ Provide Opportunities for **Contribution**: Provide opportunities for students to contribute to their classroom, school, and community such as through the Random Acts of Kindness Curriculum.
    ○ Support Healthy **Coping**: Help children and adults learn skills to cope with stress and anxiety in healthy ways.
    ○ Support a sense of **Control**: Provide students with choice and voice by providing appropriate opportunities to make decisions and have a voice in decisions made on their behalf.
	• Growing Up Resilient: Ways to build resilience in children and youth (CAMH)
	• Staying strong during tough times with the "medicine of resilience" (fnha.ca)
	• 2 x 10 Relationship Building

School Connectedness: *Foster relationships by ensuring each student has a genuine connection with at least one significant adult at school as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
School and District Leadership • Utilize decision-making processes that facilitate student, family, and community engagement; academic achievement; and staff empowerment.	• BC School Centred Mental Health Coalition • School Connectedness: What does the evidence say?

Actions	Resources
• Provide education and opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life. • Provide in-service, professional development and support for school staff to enable them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents. • Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities. Educators: • Foster connections between students and adults within the school, ensuring there is at the very least an emerging sense of comfort and genuine interest. • Give each student opportunities for regular periods of undivided attention and listening. • Encourage the expression of a full and wide range of emotions, show students they are heard by validating their experiences. • When you observe aggressive, bullying, teasing, angry or "acting-out" behavior, look for the reason behind it and the stress to which they may be responding. • Provide space to process loss. Some student's losses of loved ones or special opportunities will be more obvious; but keep in mind that the that pandemic has included some level of loss for all.	• [Using the 6 strategies that foster school connectedness](#) • [School Connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth](#)

Play: *Take time for both unstructured and structured intentional play using experiential approaches to learning as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
Educators: • Recognize that play is a critical component of learning, development, and well-being. It is important for everyone though it may look different for adults and for students. • Use play to provide opportunities to build social skills (communication and collaboration). • Use play to provide opportunities to build emotional skills (resilience and self-regulation) and explore feelings and sensations in an emotionally safe and fun way. • Use play to provide opportunities to build physical (fine and gross motor) skills. Plan outings and activities to ensure accessibility for all students, including students with disabilities or diverse abilities. • Use play to provide opportunities to build cognitive skills, supporting students to build judgement and risk management skills. Ask open-ended questions (how or why?) about what everyone is doing while you play. If students ask for help, restate the problem and ask how they think the problem could be solved before offering solutions. Give students time to think and respond to questions or to make choices.	• [BC Early Learning Framework](#) • [Play Today: BC Handbook](#) • [Let's Play! Activities for Families (PDF, 7.5MB)](#) • [On Joue? ! Activitiés pour les famille (PDF, 2MB)](#) • [Megan Zeni - Outdoor classroom blog by BC Educator/PhD student](#) • [Outsideplay.ca](#) • [Outdoor Play Canada](#) • [UBC HELP Expo Series - Promoting Outdoor Play](#)

• Use natural spaces for lessons, structured and unstructured play and allow students' interests to guide activities, games and locations to explore. • Look for metaphors and reflect on real-world or classroom applications for the dynamics and experiences you witness during play.	

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MHiS Strategy: Mental Health in the Classroom

Mental health influences all aspects of the classroom environment and student learning and behavior. The best learning is rooted in relationships, and the redesigned K-12 curriculum was developed to honour this by creating safe, nurturing and caring learning environments.

Comprehensive School Health: *Use a comprehensive, whole-school approach to support student well-being and academic success as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
• Understand the interdependence between health and education; healthy students are better learners and better educated students are healthier. • Focus on teaching and learning opportunities (formal and informal) that help to build knowledge and skills to improve health and well-being. • Pay attention to the social environment and provide opportunities to support the development of quality relationships and emotional well-being of staff and students. • Pay attention to physical spaces including buildings, equipment, and outdoor areas and the impact of the spaces on the emotional well-being of staff and students. • Review classroom and school policies, rules, procedures and or codes of conduct to ensure they are shaping a caring and safe environment and promoting student and staff health and well-being. • Cultivate partnerships and services to support improvements in student educational outcomes. Review school and community partnerships and connections to ensure they are contributing to the health and well-being of staff and students.	• What_is_Comprehensive_School_Health_-_2-pager_-_July_2016.pdf (jcsh-cces.ca) • JCSH Positive Mental Health Toolkit (wmaproducts.com) • Canadian Healthy School Standards • Comprehensive School Health • Classrooms to Communities (C2C) Education Network • Healthy Schools BC • First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness (FNHA)

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Core Competencies: *Use the Core Competencies to promote open dialogue and inquiry about mental health across all grades and learning areas as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
• Understand the Core Competencies as are sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need in order to engage in deep, lifelong learning.	• BC's Curriculum: Core Competencies • ShareEd BC

• Apply the Core Competencies as a foundation for learning to incorporate mental health and well-being across all subjects at each grade level addressing mental health and well-being topics. For example, characters' feelings in novels, visual representation of emotions in art.	• TeachBC (BCTF) • Focused Education Resources
• Use the Personal and Social competency to help students understand what they need to thrive as individuals, teaching students how to understand and care about themselves and others and providing space for concepts related to mental wellness.	

• Focus on the sub-competency of Personal Awareness and Responsibility to teach students about self-awareness and the responsibility to take steps to ensure their own well-being including:
   o setting goals and monitoring progress,
   o regulating emotions and managing stress, taking the opportunity to reflect on emotional responses to events in the school, community, province, etc. and
   o recognizing and advocating for their own rights.	

First Peoples Principles of Learning: *Integrate the First Peoples Principles of Learning into district/school/classroom practices as school communities process and move on from the pandemic experience.*

Actions	Resources
• Understand that the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) developed the First Peoples Principles of Learning to identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within particular First Nations societies.	• Instructional Samples: First Peoples' Principles of Learning
• Incorporate the First Peoples Principles of Learning into classroom environments to support all learners in feeling represented, culturally, and emotionally safe.	• First Peoples Principles of Learning (Blog created by Jo Chrona)
• Support the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors; moving from colonial individualistic thinking to community thinking understanding the influence an individual has on and experience from their greater community context, including the land and intergenerationally.	• Learning First Peoples Classroom Resources - First Nations Education Steering Committee FNESC
• Engage in learning that is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational - focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place.	
• Understand that many Indigenous communities were in isolation and lockdown for periods of time through the pandemic response. This may influence how students respond returning to school.	
• Recognize the consequences of one's actions empowering through autonomy, allowing for learning through natural consequences when appropriate and providing opportunities for critical thinking and discussion to link and incorporate learning.	

• Involve generational roles and responsibilities, connecting Elders/Knowledge-Keepers and learners in and out of classrooms and schools, scaffolding learning to meet students where they are at.
• Explore the historic and current inequities in pandemic impacts and response
• Recognize the role of traditional and present Indigenous knowledge to explore systemic connections and varying perspectives.
• Embrace learning that is embedded in memory, history, and story, using metaphors and stories to apply learnings made through pandemic experiences to other life experiences.
• Teach and learn in a way that involves patience and time, be flexible in approach, meeting students where they are.
• Explore one's identity, provide opportunity for self-discovery, reflecting on what strengths and challenges students experienced over the COVID-19 pandemic and response and what they learned about themselves.
• Recognize that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations, learn about and follow local protocols, model respectful curiosity and reciprocity with those sharing their knowledge.

Physical and Health Education Curriculum: *Use big ideas, curricular, and core competencies in the Physical and Health Education curriculum to develop the intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies of students as they return to in-person learning and interactions in the coming school year.*

Actions	Resources
• Understand that the K-12 Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum focuses on well-being and the connections between physical, intellectual, mental and social health.
• Use concepts from the PHE curriculum in every grade from K-10 and/or in the new grade 11-12 elective PHE courses to teach physical literacy, healthy and active living, and social and community health to:
▪ acknowledge the challenging year students and families, teachers and schools have collectively experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and
▪ foster open conversations with students to acknowledge stresses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and other pressures effecting mental health and well-being.
• Use the big ideas, curricular, and core competencies in the PHE curriculum to teach students to:
▪ develop strategies for healthy decision-making, making connections between decisions made during the pandemic response to healthy decision-making in the present/future,
▪ identify and respond to abusive and/or unsafe situations, e.g. ask students how they experienced physical and emotional	• Focused Education Resources
• BC's Curriculum: Supporting Student Health Elementary (PDF)
• BC's Curriculum: Supporting Student Health Secondary (PDF)
• ShareEdBC
• TeachBC (BCTF)
• Physical & Health Education BC
• Options for Sexual Health
• Physical Literacy
• School Physical Activity and Physical Literacy Project (Playfinder)
• WE Schools

safety through the pandemic response, how they experience it during school start-up and what it means for them to feel safe (understanding safety is defined uniquely and contextually by each person), ■ develop and demonstrate respectful behaviour and relationships, e.g. discuss how consent was highlighted during the pandemic response, in navigating restrictions and connections with others ■ identify feelings and practices that support mental well-being, sharing what worked and did not in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and response ■ recognize potential effects of substance use and strategies for preventing personal harm.	• SOGI Education • erase: expect respect and a safe education • Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity & Recreation Council (ISPARC)

Background information

Mental Health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being; it impacts how we think, what we feel and the way we act. It also affects how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Mental health is influenced by biological factors, life experiences and environment, as well as our relationships with friends, family, our community, language, culture, and to the land.

There are many factors that influence mental health both positively and negatively; these are commonly referred to as protective or risk factors. These risk and protective factors have been identified as stemming from individual level factors such as genetic and biological makeup, social and emotional learning, and physical health; social factors such as school and peer connections, parental emotional attachment, and community belonging and spiritual well-being; and structural and environmental factors such as socio-economic status, neighbourhood safety, cultural continuity and access to green spaces. Protective factors can act as a buffer to risks and lead to positive developmental outcomes and resilience.

School supports students to develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities they need for lifelong success. In-person learning, as a part of a student peer engagement, promotes social and emotional development as well as overall wellness. It also provides many students access to programs and services that are integral to their overall health and well-being.

Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19

The negative impacts of COVID-19 and response measures on mental health have been widely highlighted by numerous sources including, but not limited to, government announcements, research reports, the media, and education partner organizations. The review completed by the Mental Health School Start-up Working Group confirmed that while there are many research and data collection projects in progress, the overall short- and long-term mental health impacts are yet to be fully uncovered.

BCCDC's *Impact of School Closures on Learning, Child and Family Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic* report identified that 60.3% of households with school aged children interviewed in the BC SPEAK survey in May 2020 reported an increase in child stress and 79.2% reported decreased connection with friends as a result of school closures. BC is one of the few jurisdictions that kept schools open for the

entire 2020/21 school year, and while many students may have experienced decreased connection due to cohort separations, the impact may be less impactful than full closure. The *Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) Data and Trends 2020-2021* report identifies that Children in grade 7 reported lower levels of well-being in 2020-2021 as compared to previous years while children in grade 4 reported consistent levels of well-being to previous years. The Ministry of Education's Student Learning Survey and COVID-19 Impact on Learning Survey data analysis is ongoing.

Forthcoming data will further illustrate trends over the course of the pandemic. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) *Keeping Safe Schools Open in a Pandemic Survey* reported that teachers' mental and physical health has worsened during the pandemic, with ongoing concern about COVID-19 health and safety measures and increased workload. The Human Early Learning Partnership's *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teacher Well-Being in British Columbia* report corroborated this and further highlighted educator experiences of disconnection, with fewer opportunities to connect with others in their school communities.

Research on the impacts of COVID-19 have highlighted that persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous Black and other racialized populations and those with pre-existing mental health challenges have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. These individuals may have felt stronger impacts due to social and racial injustice and inequity, ableism, structural bias, economic disadvantage and other health and life circumstances and as a result they may require additional supports as a part of the recovery process. In particular, Indigenous communities have endured a complex and devastating history of pandemics.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life for everyone and has created ongoing uncertainty and isolation. Coping with this uncertainty has been and continues to be challenging and many people have felt worried, stressed, anxious, and overwhelmed. In addition to the direct influences on day-to-day life, COVID-19 and related response measures have created barriers for many people in accessing their supports and usual coping skills.

Policy Influences

A Pathway to Hope

[A Pathway to Hope](#) sets a ten-year vision and roadmap for an improved system of mental health and substance use care in BC. It is supported by a series of key actions, organized into four focus areas: Improved Wellness for Children, Youth and Young Adults, Supporting Indigenous Led Solutions, Substance Use: Better Care, Saving Lives, and Improve Access, Better Quality. The Improved Wellness for Children, Youth and Young Adults key area includes an emphasis on prevention, wellness promotion and early intervention. Priority actions under this key area include promoting early childhood social and emotional development, expanding Foundry Centers, implementing Integrated Child and Youth Teams, and promoting the Ministry of Education's *Mental Health in Schools* (*MHiS) Strategy.*

Mental Health in Schools Strategy

In September, 2020, the Ministry of Education released the [Mental Health in Schools (MHiS) Strategy](#), outlining a vision and pathway for mental health promotion in the K-12 education system to create and ensure school environments support well-being and positive mental health.

The *MHiS Strategy* embeds positive mental health and wellness programs and services for students in all areas including school culture, leadership, curriculum and learning environments through three core elements of Compassionate Systems Leadership, Capacity Building, and Mental Health in the Classroom.

If you wish to provide feedback or recommend resources or actions for this document, please email EDUC.MentalHealth@gov.bc.ca.