



PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS'
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Children and Youth Mental Health, a Top Priority for Alberta Public Schools

Public schools are collaborative partners in identifying, supporting and seeking solutions for students experiencing mental health issues.

The mental health of students, faculty and staff has always been a top priority of Public Schools across Alberta - pre-covid, during covid and now, post covid. Although the pandemic is the most recent traumatic life event students and staff have experienced, we must also acknowledge that our province has experienced numerous traumatic life events over the last decade that have had lasting effects on mental health.

In 2013, Calgary experienced mass floods disrupting students and staff alike. In 2016, Fort McMurray faced devastating fires that uprooted and displaced many people. These two large natural disaster examples are just two of the major events that have affected our students, faculty and staff. Add on to these events the pandemic, inflation and funding constraints; and it is clear stress triggers are compounding leading to mental health problems affecting those in the Public School system and across Alberta.

While we are not medical researchers, Public Schools recognize the correlation between mental and physical health to learning success and are collaborative partners in identifying, supporting and seeking solutions for students experiencing mental health problems.



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Our members work diligently to support their students and families struggling with mental health issues - every day.

Like us, you may be hearing that more resources are needed to support the mental health of Alberta children and youth. We agree and encourage the government to provide sufficient mental health funding and supports for students, faculty and staff. We must emphasize, Public Schools seek equitable access to mental health supports for all students, faculty and staff across the province.

Public Schools are uniquely positioned within the community and as such recognize that child / adolescent mental health issues are distinct, requiring focused attention and effort. Public Schools provide an important role in assisting students and their families in addressing mental health issues and navigating a path to wellness.

What do the solutions for child and youth mental health look like?

When seeking solutions, it is important to consider diverse perspectives and experiences from various sources. Public Schools are often the place where child and adolescent mental health issues are first recognized and where the first steps in getting help for students occur. Our insights are critical to the development of mental health supports for children and youth and we are eager to contribute to the much needed solutions.

Coinciding with the recent budget announcements by the provincial government, discussions about new initiatives to address, in large part, youth mental health problems have risen. You may have heard terms such as integrated school-based services, mental health classroom teams and mental health hubs. These are initiatives that we look forward to learning more as well as playing an important role in both the planning and implementation of this work ahead of us.



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We recognize the correlation between mental and physical health to learning success.

The fact is, there's a direct correlation between mental health and learning outcomes, putting public schools at the core of all solutions developed for our students and families – we have a vested interest and a unique perspective. As such, we seek to strengthen the framework connecting the Public School system, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to better address the mental health needs of students and staff.

As an employer, Public Schools recognize the important need to support the mental health of faculty and staff throughout the system also. Without a thriving workforce, we cannot hope to support our students in overcoming mental health issues and achieving positive learning outcomes. While standard human resources practice draws a link between mental health and employee productivity and retention, we seek to achieve a work environment that supports our staff in a truly fulsome manner.

Public Schools seek equitable access to mental health supports for students across the province and as such, Albertans need an increased workforce specializing in mental health.

In order to fully address mental health issues in public schools, one must take a holistic approach. As such, we encourage government to create more post secondary spaces to fortify the workforce who will address mental health issues. The fundamental aspect of such an initiative spans across numerous roles, designations and areas of practice. Not only do we need more resources focused on child and youth mental health in the fields of psychiatry, psychology and social work, but we also require additional on-site supports such as guidance counsellors, education assistants and support staff.

Public Schools are collaborative partners helping to find mental health support solutions.

While each district has its own set of challenges and opportunities, we encourage you to become more informed and engaged to ensure students in your region, and across the province, receive the best possible Public School education. I invite you to reach out to your local Public School Board and meet directly with the community leaders who are guiding K-12 education for your region.