

Mental Health and Well-Being



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



THE ISSUE

More students are experiencing mental health challenges. Schools need more support to respond to urgent situations while promote long-term preventative measures.

Research has demonstrated a marked increase in mental health needs amongst children and youth in recent years. Further, the pandemic has magnified existing inequalities and disparities related to mental health both inside and outside of education. Families are feeling heightened levels of strain which further impacts parent-child relationships and well-being. Community agencies are struggling to meet the needs resulting in long waitlists and gaps in services for children and families.

Bureaucratic funding structures, restrictive rules and red tape do not always reflect the fact that supporting children and youth mental health relies on a partnership between schools and community partner organizations.

The impact is being felt in schools - for individual students, their classmates and staff. Ultimately, mental health teams must focus their efforts on meeting urgent needs, which limits their ability to support longer term measures to promote positive mental health and well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While increased awareness and funding directed towards mental health supports have been beneficial, more support is needed to meet increasing demand. To address mental health and well-being challenges in schools, the OCDSB recommends:

1

Increase funding: Funding guidelines should provide increased flexibility and creativity to allow school teams to partner with community agencies in order to deliver services to students and families. Further, summer funding should stretch into the school calendar year as required.

2

Training and professional development: Increase opportunities for all educators to receive training to support student mental health. Incentives should be available for staff to pursue in-depth training. In addition, training in the area of mental health should be embedded in new teacher learning and certification programs.

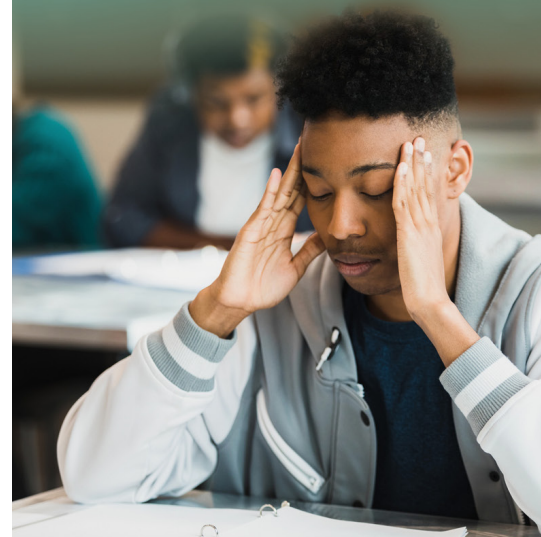
44%

Ottawa students reported fair or poor mental health

42%

Ottawa students said they wanted to talk to someone but didn't know where to turn

Results from the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 2021





MORE INFORMATION

Mental health professionals' caseloads have continually increased and are required to support increasingly complex mental health challenges for a longer period of time as students wait for service through community agencies. Since the pandemic we are seeing heightened levels of students who are disconnected from school. It is essential to have staff resources to support these young people as they are often our most underserved students.

As a result of the work being focused largely on urgent responses (such as violent incidents, suicide risk assessments, and supporting students with complex mental health needs), the OCDSB struggles to provide ongoing implementation support and coaching for mental health promotion and prevention efforts. This results in missed opportunities for proactive measures which may prevent students from requiring more intensive supports and services down the road.

School Mental Health Ontario is producing incredible resources which help to support this work. However, additional staffing is required to ensure this information and programming is shared so more students can benefit.

Ottawa students in grades 7-12 reported significantly poorer mental health and emotional wellness in 2021 compared to 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic). Students also reported increases in psychological distress, self-harm, and thoughts about attempting suicide.

Poor mental health and well-being, thoughts about attempting suicide, and self-harm behaviours were more prevalent amongst students in grades 9-12, of socioeconomic disadvantage, and identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+.

Results from the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 2021