OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 19-103

TO: Trustees
Student Trustees

FROM: Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education and Secretary of the Board
Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services
Dr. Petra Duschner, Manager, Mental Health & Critical Services

DATE: 20 September 2019

RE: Support for Mental Health Through An Equity Lens

The following memo provides information on the development of the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy in accordance with the strategic priorities identified by School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) and the alignment between the Mental Health Strategy and the OCDSB Strategic Plan in order to provide a context for a Board motion related to mental health services, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent. The memo further outlines staff's proposed steps forward in understanding and addressing the Board motion.

1. OCDSB Mental Health Strategy:

The OCDSB is currently in the process of developing a Mental Health Strategy for 2019-2022. The Mental Health Strategy is a requirement of School Mental Health Ontario which outlines areas of strategic priority:

1. Organizational conditions;
2. Capacity building;
3. Evidence-based mental health promotion & prevention programming;
4. Equity and specific populations;
5. System coordination and pathways;
6. Youth and family engagement; and
7. Progress monitoring and impact.

To operationalize the priorities identified in the Mental Health Strategy, annual mental health action plans will be developed to identify key work, approach/methods used, success indicators and timelines.

2. Alignment with OCDSB Strategic Plan:

The development of the Mental Health Strategy is informed by the OCDSB Strategic Plan 2019-2023. To date, data has been gathered from staff, students and parents and further input is being sought through consultation with Board committees (e.g., Advisory

Committee on Equity, Special Education Advisory Committee, etc.) and community partners. Together this information will inform the development of the Strategy so that it not only meets the requirements of SMHO, but reflects the needs of the OCDSB community in line with the OCDSB Strategic Plan. Specifically, the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy 2019-2022 will be aligned with the OCDSB's Strategic Plan and the strategic priorities will be embedded in Cultures of Innovation, Caring and Social Responsibility.

3. **Board Motion:**

At Committee of the Whole (COW) on April 16, 2019, the following motion was referred to staff for a response by the end of September 2019:

THAT the Board direct staff to explore and report on funding to support mental health through an equity lens, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent.

THAT the Board direct staff to evaluate, through an equity lens, barriers to access mental health services within the OCDSB, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent.

4. **Relationship between OCDSB Mental Health Strategy and Board Motion**:

As will be outlined in the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy, an equity lens is applied to all work in mental health. We continue to deepen our understanding of identities and the impact of identity on mental health and will strive to provide culturally responsive interventions. For example:

Capacity Building: a goal to *increase staff knowledge in equity and inclusive practice* and in *creating and sustaining mentally healthy and inclusive schools* will help ensure a welcoming, inclusive environment where staff know and understand their students' profiles and history, as well as the impact of social determinants of health (e.g., education, income, employment, housing, access to health services, race), historical and intergenerational trauma and systemic marginalization on mental health. Within this context, students will feel safe, included and cared for. Diversity is recognized and respected as students see themselves reflected in their environment and in the curriculum and will feel they matter and have a sense of belonging.

Equity and Specific Populations: specific focus on equity and specific populations as a strategic priority will help ensure that educators understand identity and how identity impacts mental health. Further, it ensures that specific groups of students will be able to access culturally responsive support for mental health issues.

System Coordination and Pathways: As a priority area, this focus will help ensure that pathways to care include culturally relevant community resources and services (e.g., Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), Rajo Project, Jaku Konbit, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Inuuqatigiit) and that those resources are known and accessible to those who need them. This will build a system of care following a tiered approach to intervention within which each student can access the supports and services needed, when they need them.

5. **Plan to address the Board motion:**

With respect to addressing the specific elements outlined in the Board motion, the following plan is proposed for consideration:

1. Current funding provided by the Ministry includes: funding for mental health workers in secondary schools, funding for Well-being, Safe, Accepting and Healthy schools and Mental Health. Specific mental health services are also provided through community partnerships which fund school-based community mental health workers, including those mentioned above. Through Jordan's Principle, funding is available for First Nations and Inuit students to access a range of services including mental health services. We will explore other sources of funding available to enhance or expand mental health supports.

2. To explore and report on systemic barriers to access mental health services within the OCDSB, we propose a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach including:
    1. Literature review on the barriers to accessing mental health services for Indigenous youth and youth of African descent;
    2. Community collaboration on exiting review. For example, Ottawa Pubic Health is engaged in a research project (Mental Health of Ottawa's Black Community) which aims to better understand the Black community's views on mental health, identify and address gaps in the mental health care system and develop community-based strategies to better connect families to mental health services and reduce health inequities;
    3. Engage the OCDSB community through focus groups including students who identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis and students of African-descent to better understand their experience in accessing mental health services within their schools and community in order to identify and address barriers to access; and
    4. Survey of staff to assess their knowledge of existing pathways of care both within the school district and in the community.

The plan proposed by staff will serve to enhance the District's understanding of mental health and well-being, while deepening our understanding of the complexities and barriers to supporting the mental well-being of specific populations. This will inform our next steps towards improving services and experiences for students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Peter Symmonds at peter.symmonds@ocdsb.ca

cc Senior Staff
Manager, Board Services
Special Education Advisory Committee
Corporate Records