

## ESS Report for DEC Ends Policy #2

3 March 2021

Goal 2: Demonstrate continuous improvement by increasing engagement through innovative teaching and assessment practices, promoting mental fitness through social-emotional learning.

Strategy 2.1.1: Explicitly embed best practices related to resiliency and social emotional learning with all ASD-S staff and students.

### Section 1

Desired Outcome 2.1.1a: ASD-S School Admin Teams will have the knowledge to promote mental fitness with their staff.

Outcome Measure: 2.1.1a1: 100% of Administrators will have awareness of how to promote mental fitness with their staff.

#### **Status: In Progress**

Initiative #1: A workshop based on Shawn Achor's *The Happiness Advantage* has been developed and will be delivered to principals in April.

- *The Happiness Advantage* is a best-selling book which applied positive psychology to management.
- Positive psychology is an area of study in psychology which focuses on human potential and individual strengths.
- The book focuses on seven positive psychology strategies which leaders and managers can employ to improve mental health and resilience in the workplace. The seven strategies are:
  1. Maximizing positive emotion (The Happiness Advantage)
  2. Changing Mindset (The Fulcrum and the Lever)
  3. "Training Your Brain" to see opportunity (The Tetris Effect)
  4. Creating new success out of failure (Falling Up)
  5. Focusing on Circle of Control (The Zorro Circle)
  6. Removing Barriers (The 20 Second Rule)
  7. Maximizing Social Investment
- Shawn Achor is a management consultant and best-selling author who specializes in applying positive psychology to management practices.
  - He has been a consultant to over thirty Fortune 100 companies, The White House, The Pentagon, The NBA, The NFL, and has appeared on Oprah's Winfrey's network.
- Copies of *The Happiness Advantage* will be available for admin teams for a book study.
- The District Management team has already completed this book study.

## Initiative #2: Ongoing consultation with mental health experts.

**June 15: Kevin Cameron** met with principals to consult on working with staff during stressful events. Mr Cameron is the executive director of the North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response and is a Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress. Mr Cameron focused on encouraging positive mental health activities to manage stress, including using time away from work to strengthen personal relationships. He also addressed the added stressors of the Nova Scotia shootings and civil unrest.

**August 25: Mr Cameron** met with principals virtually to review his “Trauma-Informed Return to School.” Mr Cameron focused on emotional supports, understanding the impact of the pandemic on families, and anxiety and stress.

**August 27:** Principals participated in a three-hour workshop with **Dr Daniel Chorney** of Dr Daniel Chorney & Associates Psychological Services. Dr Chorney is the chair of the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology, a scientific advisor to Anxiety Canada, and the former Anxiety Team Lead at the IWK. Dr Chorney worked with principals on understanding anxiety related to COVID, the most common types of anxiety staff experience and how to approach each concern, and an overview of other components of mental health principals need to consider with the return to school.

**October 20:** Kevin Cameron consulted with the ASD-S Management Team. This consultation led to our management project of visiting with each school’s administrative team to check in on specific coping concerns with COVID.

**November 5 & 6:** An administrator from each of the five largest high schools spent two days with **Kevin Cameron** being trained in **Traumatic Events Systems**. Though this training is specific to supporting communities in the aftermath of a traumatic event, the human systems theory and trauma-informed approach is helpful to supporting staff at any time, but especially in the context of the ongoing stress of the pandemic.

**November 18:** Kevin Cameron consulted with the superintendents and directors of all school districts on the concerns for adult staff as well as students at that point in the school year.

**February 3: Kevin Cameron** spent an hour consulting with principals on stress and mental health during COVID. Mr Cameron focused on staff fatigue, perspective taking and a focus on gratitude and growth, and also critical periods and staff who may be especially vulnerable to psychological stress.

In addition, I ran a workshop with school administrators on August 26 on Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) focusing on school-wide programming, embedding SEL as a positive education approach, and the importance of “co-regulation”, or staff self-regulating alongside their students (“walking the walk, not just talking the talk”). I also did a self-care presentation for school leaders in June.

## Initiative #3: Positive Workplace Framework

Some schools will be adopting the Positive Workplace Framework. This is a program developed by Dr Bill Morrison and Dr Patricia Peterson at UNB. This program involves surveying school

staff for positive workplace practices. These are observable practices, not “I feel” or perception statements. The principal then is given training or the support of a trained individual to introduce more positive workplace practices into the school.

Schools have this information, and we will have numbers of how many will be participating by April.

Initiative #4: The 8th Annual ASD-South District Physical Activity Challenge

Physical activity is an important component of maintaining good mental health and resilience.

The ASD-S Physical Activity Challenge ran from January 10<sup>th</sup> to February 13<sup>th</sup> and challenged ASD-S employees to complete 150 minutes of physical activity each week. 655 ASD-S employees participated in the challenge, with 381 completing the final survey.

## Section 2

Outcome Measure: 2.1.2a1: 100% of the District Educational Staff will have the capacity to embed positive education to promote social emotional learning in their practices.

### **Status: In Progress**

Initiative #1: ESS staff have been collaborating with curriculum coordinators and coaches to improve knowledge and understanding of social-emotional learning.

The curriculum coordinators and coaches meet monthly and have been learning about Social & Emotional Learning so it can be embedded in their work. In the fall, Gail Fillmore-Crilley worked with the coordinators and coaches on embedding SEL across the curriculum. In December, Jennifer Grant, school counselling coordinator, and Heather Whittaker, school counselling lead teacher, worked with coordinators and coaches on the CASEL approach to SEL.

- CASEL is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Five aspects usually represented with the CASEL Wheel.
  - a. Self-Awareness
  - b. Self-Management
  - c. Social Awareness
  - d. Relationship Skills
  - e. Responsible Decision-Making

Jen and Heather followed up in January focusing on Self-Awareness and I will be delivering PL on Positive Education, which is the application of positive psychology to education. The underlying principle of positive education is that the skills of well-being can be taught alongside the skills of achievement without being an add on. An example is teaching the skill of gratitude (skill of wellbeing) alongside the skill of writing (skill of achievement).

### Initiative #2: Training from experts

Dr Chorney provided training on anxiety on November 3<sup>rd</sup> (K-5) and 19<sup>th</sup> (6-12). This training also included COVID mental health concerns and school avoidance.

### Initiative #3: School-based initiatives

Schools continue to implement and maintain school-based SEL projects, as have been reported to the DEC previously. Currently, of the forty schools in the School Improvement Framework project, eighteen have it as an explicit school improvement focus. Other schools continue to maintain the initiatives they already have in place.

An example of an ongoing initiative is the 4<sup>th</sup> R program in 16 schools. The 4<sup>th</sup> R promotes healthy youth relationships. The 4<sup>th</sup> R takes the approach that healthy relationship skills need to be taught directly in the same way the reading, writing, and arithmetic are.

An example of a new initiative, Loch Lomond School staff is doing a book study on growth mindset using *The Growth Mindset Coach* from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Growth mindset is the opposite of a fixed mindset. People with a growth mindset are more likely to continue in the face of challenges than people with a fixed mindset. For teachers, it involves consciously considering how they foster a growth mindset in students, and this book has excellent activities for teachers to coach growth mindset. It can be simple as shifting from “You did well on the test, you **are good** at math” to “You did well on the test, you **work hard** at math.”