

How can Compassionate Systems Leadership embed SEL and well-being across an entire school district?

Well-being and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) have become increasingly top priorities in Canadian schools as concerns rise about the mental health and well-being of both staff and students. However, the vast majority of education leaders have not been trained to lead efforts that would integrate well-being and SEL across entire school districts through programs, policies, and practices that transform school cultures for the long term. This means that SEL initiatives are often one-off and unsustainable, and are restrained from becoming a reality across schools in every province and territory. On the flipside, emerging practice demonstrates that a Compassionate Systems Leadership approach – which combines mindfulness, compassion system-wide thinking and action – can strengthen the capacity of education leaders to effectively embed well-being at all levels of the education system.

THE THREE MAIN COMPONENTS OF COMPASSIONATE SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP INCLUDE:

1. Personal mastery	Developing self-awareness, mindfulness, and compassion for self and others.
2. Interpersonal skills	Building one’s awareness through intentional listening as well as clear and respectful communication, which can lead to more effective problem-solving among teams.
3. Systems thinking	Understanding the underlying elements that shape a school’s organizational culture (i.e. its system of beliefs, values, behaviours, ways of communicating, etc.) as a way to determine levers for change.

IN ADDITION, HERE ARE THREE KEY PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER WHEN PRACTICING COMPASSIONATE SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP:

1. Inner change creates outer change	The first step in building leadership capacity is to increase awareness of yourself – your own values and biases.
2. Everyone is a leader	Everyone has the potential to create or support change regardless of their position within the school and district. More impact can be achieved when school leaders and staff learn and act together.
3. Learning is continuous	Developing skills and knowledge is an ongoing effort of practicing what you’ve learned, reflecting on what’s working and not working, and being open to adapting.

A Compassionate Systems Leadership approach guides education leaders in developing their own SEL skills as they grow in their ability to implement system-wide change in support of staff and student well-being. When education leaders cultivate compassion through SEL skills including empathy, sound decision-making, and self-regulation, they are better able to create educational cultures that emphasize well-being, understand barriers to change, and encourage other staff to contribute towards the change process.

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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