



## Supporting Students' Mental Health for Post-COVID Recovery

In reference to the article *Distress Undermines Learning: Positive mental health must be a key part of our post-COVID recovery vision for schools*, by Dr. Claire Crooks (Education Canada, March 2022)

### Learning Objectives

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- 1** Participants will understand and respond to the argument that schools have an important role to play in a tiered approach to student mental health.
- 2** Participants will consider how they could better support student mental health in their practice and at their school.

**REVIEW:** 5 minutes**AIM: TO INTRODUCE THE SESSION'S THEME BY REVIEWING KEY POINTS FROM THE ARTICLE**

- 1 Canada's children are not all thriving. Even before the pandemic, the UN ranked us 31st out of 38 rich countries on children's mental health and happiness. And data collected by SickKids looking at COVID impacts found that over half of kids 8-12, and 70 percent of adolescents, reported significant depression. For youth belonging to marginalized groups, the negative impact has been amplified.
- 2 Schools can play a central role in promoting student well-being. Many skills that underlie positive mental health can be taught. Most children and youth attend school, which minimizes access barriers, and educators who see children daily are well positioned to notice worrisome changes. Finally, promoting facets of mental health, such as self-regulation and optimism, improves learning and leads to a better school experience for both students and staff.
- 3 Teachers and schools cannot and should not be expected to act as social workers and psychologists. The author advocates a three-tiered approach to school mental health, with clear roles at each tier.
  - o **Tier 1** consists of universal prevention or mental-health promotion, like creating welcoming spaces for all students, teaching social-emotional learning concepts and skills, and delivering universal programs to promote well-being.
  - o **Tier 2** provides additional support to students who may be considered vulnerable, for example programs for students from certain equity-seeking groups to help buffer against experiences of discrimination or past trauma or students already showing signs of distress. These may be implemented by mental-health professionals, but take place within the school.
  - o **Tier 3** consists of specialized professional services for students with more severe and complex mental health needs. Ideally, schools would help link students to such services, but the author notes that the reality of too few mental health services and long wait lists means that schools are often left trying to support students with Tier 3 needs.

**DISCUSS** 20 minutes**AIM: TO SHARE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS***Choose from the list below, or suggest questions more specific to your learning community.*

- Canadian children are reporting high rates of depression and anxiety, and our teen suicide rate is also high. Thinking of the students you teach now, are mental health problems visible in your classroom? How do they show up? Are there any students you are worried about? Are you aware of any tools, resources, or programs (within or without the school system) that might be helpful for them?