

Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCB) Program in School Initiative

The MHCB team works collaboratively and in partnership with school administration and staff to promote positive mental health and social-emotional learning, which is foundational to children and youths' academic achievement, resiliency, and overall well-being.

The MHCB team use a universal, strength-based approach to promoting positive mental health and social-emotional learning that encompasses all and supports the goals of prevention, inclusion, compassionate support, and healthy development.

Research clearly indicates that for children and youth to develop and apply knowledge and skills needed for social, emotional, and academic growth, we (schools, community and families) need to work collectively to reinforce principles through everyday practices and policies (CASEL, 2021).

Working collaboratively

Together, the school and MHCB team increases awareness, knowledge and skills that support children and youths' mental health and ability to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain strong supportive relationships, make responsible and caring decisions, and lead healthier lives. (CASEL, 2021).

The MHCB program partners with schools who are:

- committed to schoolwide social emotional learning implementation. Understands SEL is a process embedded into everyday learning and activities rather than a one-time event.
- invested in developing and championing their schools' schoolwide social-emotional learning plan, within the scope of a capacity building model. MHCB uses the assets that already exists in the school, such as the staffs' knowledge, expertise and leadership. By "working with" school staff, MHCB staff role models and mentors embedding mental health concepts into curricular outcomes as well as integrating key concepts into existing school wide activities and everyday experiences and routines.

Involved, committed and supportive school leadership is one of the most important elements in a successful schoolwide approach to SEL (encompassing both positive mental health and healthy relationships promotion). Successful schoolwide SEL programming requires committed school leaders who understand the central role that emotions and relationships play in effective educational practice, and who are willing to transform a school's culture and infrastructure to support a schoolwide approach to SEL, that is about approaching education in a way that is systematic, planful and consistent (CASEL, n.d). Strathcona County's Mental Health Capacity Building program (MHCB) provides the staffing and support required to implement an integrated, school-based community mental health promotion and prevention program.

Positive mental health is defined as "the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnectedness, and personal dignity" (Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), 2006)

According to a [meta-analysis](#) of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students, those who participated in evidence-based SEL programs showed an 11 percentile-point gain in academic achievement compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs.

A [survey](#) of teachers in 2013 found 93 percent of teachers want a greater focus on social and emotional learning in schools.

(www.casel.org)

(Source: *Well Aware: Developing Resilient, Active and Flourishing Students*, 2015)

Why is positive mental health and social-emotional learning (SEL) important?

Decades of research demonstrates high quality social emotional learning programming improve students' academic performance, skills, attitudes, level of engagement in learning opportunities, prosocial behaviors and can regulate their emotions and focus better on tasks. Furthermore, students are less likely to display disruptive behaviors in the classrooms and there is a decrease anxiety and struggling with self-regulation and basic social skills.

Positive mental health and social emotional learning programming supports children and youth to recognize feelings and regulate their emotions, so they are less likely to get caught in emotional distress and develop social and emotional skills to build positive relationships and community connectedness to support overall well-being.

When efforts are focused at universal prevention and promotion, using a schoolwide and community wide approach, there is less work to do in terms of intervention and such an approach helps to both reduce the number of individuals who will develop mental health disorders as well as provides an optimal environment for all to flourish, including those who are experiencing mental health challenges. Research tells us that that mental health development and SEL are not secondary to academic achievement but are foundational to academic achievement and to nurturing healthy individuals who can navigate life's challenges and make positive contributions to our communities (CASEL, 2013; Durlak & Weissberg, 2011). Fostering positive mental health is most effective when it is integral to our students' and our own everyday experience, inside and outside the classroom.



Figure Source: www.casel.org