



ST. CLAIR CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
Lighting the Way ~ Rejoicing in Our Journey

St. Clair Catholic Submits its Board Mental Health Strategy Report to the Province

The St. Clair Catholic District School Board has submitted its *Mental Health Strategy* report to the Ontario government. The report, which was submitted on March 31, 2014, outlines the Board's mental health plan for the next three years.

"This is a comprehensive plan, which will guide St. Clair Catholic's focus on mental health," says Deb Crawford, Superintendent of Education. "The plan was developed following extensive consultation with students, staff, parents and community mental health service providers."

Consultation was in the form of a questionnaire, which surveyed more than 2,000 elementary students, 1,800 secondary students, 475 staff (including teachers, principals and support staff) and nearly 300 parents.

"The findings of the survey affirm that what we have been doing up until now has been very much on track and effective," says Mrs. Crawford. "It has also given us very reliable data that will allow us to move forward."

Some of the key findings include:

Staff Needs:

- Further education about mental health.
- Classroom strategies embedded in the curriculum.
- Information about community resources to provide to parents.
- Easier access to Board resources.

Staff Comments:

- More children/youth with more challenges of increased behavioural and mental health concerns.
- Learning in this environment is difficult for all students.
- Feel pressured to deliver curriculum and know that children and youth need more than the traditional curriculum.

What Students Say About Bullying – Elementary:

- In overwhelming numbers, students feel safe and welcome at school; however, bullying still happens – at least once and sometimes multiple times a week for about 10 per cent of elementary age children.
- Students know who to talk to but feel isolated and fear repercussions.
- Happens most often during unstructured times and in unsupervised areas of the school.

What Students Say About Bullying – Secondary:

- In overwhelming numbers, students feel safe and welcome at school; however, when bullying does happen, students most often ignore it.
- When students observe bullying, they most often tell their friends; not an adult.

Anxiety and Depression:

- Secondary students report elevated levels of anxiety and depression – especially girls.

What Parents Say About Mental Wellness:

- We believe universal programming, integrated into the curriculum, can reduce bullying and mental health stigma; and help children and youth develop coping strategies and resiliency skills.
- The majority of parents (more than 75%) support the integration of social skill development and mental health awareness into the curriculum.
- All children in the classroom are affected when mental health challenges are not addressed.
- Schools need the support of the community to adequately address the needs of all students. Only 40% of parents expressed confidence that they had an awareness of community services.
- Parents recognize the need for school staff and parents to work together in partnership with the community to help children experiencing mental health challenges.

The report sets out goals, strategies and expected outcomes in each of the next three years for three main areas of effort: organizational conditions, capacity building and mental health promotion and prevention.

“Our plan is targeted and specific,” says Mrs. Crawford. “Our consultation has helped us to identify gaps and set a course for real and measureable progress in each of these important areas over the next three years.”