



Creating School Connectedness

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Acknowledging the Land

Our session today is being held on Treaty 6 land, which is the traditional territory of many nations, including many Cree and Metis peoples. I wish to acknowledge those peoples as Traditional Owners of these lands. I would also like to pay my respects to the Elders of these lands, both past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.





Supporting Healthy School Communities in Alberta

Vision

All Alberta students belong to healthy school communities that enable optimal health and learning.

Mission

To provide provincial leadership that promotes and supports healthy, active school communities through a comprehensive school health approach.

Priority

Lead, support and connect work towards improved health and learning outcomes of children in Alberta.



Structure & Funding



The Alberta
Teachers' Association



A special project of the Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC) of the Alberta Teachers' Association

Funded by:

- Alberta Education
- Alberta Health
- Alberta Culture & Tourism



Session Outcomes

- What is school connectedness?
- Ways to foster a positive social environment using a Comprehensive School Health approach



Let's Discuss



What does it mean to be connected or to have school connectedness?

School connectedness is...

These are some of the major elements that help kids feel they belong and are cared for at their school:

- Parents and Teachers who support and care for individual students
- Good friends at school
- Students caring about current and future academic performance
- Discipline policies that are fair and efficient
- Participation in extra curricular activities

(The Wellness Fund)



Let's Discuss



Why is prioritizing school connectedness important?

COMPASS Study

81% feel safe at school

78% feel teachers treat them fairly

72% feel close to people at school

70% feel a part of their school



Academic Success

Research on school improvement, as well as brain research, shows a direct correlation between positive school culture and academic achievement.



The Whole Child

A student's sense of belonging in school plays a key role, not only in academic success, but also in decreasing risky behavior and supporting mental well-being.

Example: [Treaty 7 Sport Initiative Video](#)

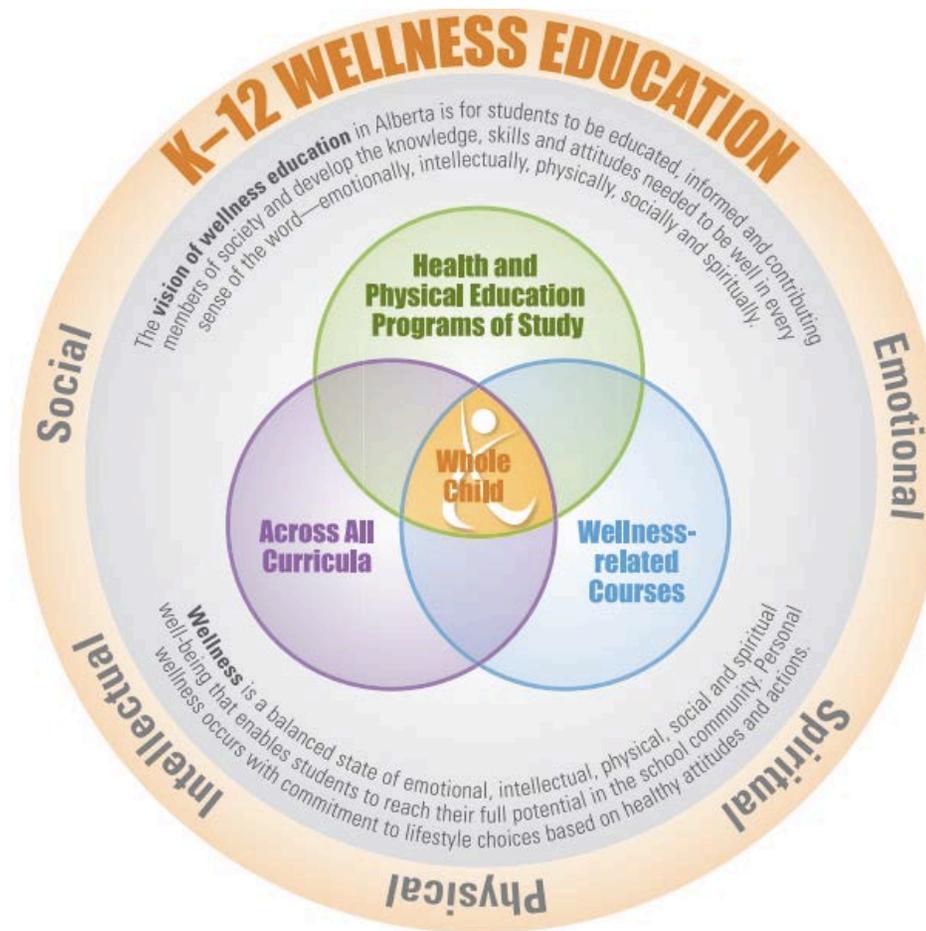


AB Education Competencies

- Critical Thinking
- **Communication**
- Problem Solving
- **Collaboration**
- Managing Information
- **Cultural & Global Citizenship**
- Creativity & Innovation
- **Personal Growth & Well-Being**



Framework for Wellness Education



What about YOU?

- School climate is associated with teacher retention
- To make changes and implement new approaches and strategies, staff must feel a sense of belonging and connectedness and know that they are safe to practice, learn from their or others “mis-steps,” re-think and try again.



Let's Discuss



What are you already doing in your classroom or at your school to support connectedness?



Comprehensive School Health



Physical and Social Environment

Does your school...

- Allow and encourage students to participate in decision-making?
- Foster an atmosphere of trust, tolerance, co-operation and empathy?
- Have a welcoming, student-centered environment? (e.g. sofas, plants, student artwork, quotes and photos on display)
- Showcase student achievement and unity?



Teaching and Learning

Does your school....

- Provide students with an enhanced understanding and appreciation of diversity?
- Incorporate culturally-relevant themes into instructional practices and activities?
- Offer students a chance to learn and practice social skills?
- Accommodate individual learning needs and preferences?
- Support autonomy by minimizing control, listening to and validating student perspectives?



Partnerships and Services

Does your school....

- Interact with the home regarding student learning issues?
- Collaborate with families in the design of school improvement and learning initiatives?
- Adopt a policy to ensure collaboration with community and government organizations?
- Offer opportunities for participation in school-community action groups or committees?



Policy

Does your school...

- Provide alternatives to zero-tolerance policies that allow for continued school connected and restoration?
- Ensure that all students and staff members are held accountable for upholding and modeling rules pertaining to respectful behavior?
- Have policies that contribute to the physical and emotional safety of all students?
- Offer ongoing professional development related to positive mental health?
- Support the provision of timely assessment and early response services to students with significant learning or social-emotional concerns?





Mentorship Opportunity

Ever Active Schools mentorship opportunities are a great chance your school to be coached along its unique comprehensive school health journey. Each school is provided with an Education Specialist to enhance the health & wellness of your school and students by shifting existing lesson plans and activities across all subject areas to ultimately support the health and learning outcomes of all students.

More info at www.everactive.org/mentorship

What can one teacher do?

- Resource created by Kim Hordal-Hlewka (Ever Active Schools) & Tricia Giles-Wang (Teacher)
- Be confident in your ability to make a difference!



Check Yourself!

Notice yourself

Attune to the present moment

Validate the student's experience

Introspection; check in with yourself

Guess (gently) at unspoken signals

Accurately Reflect what you've heard

Truthfulness; don't be fake.

Empathy

- Dr. April Elliot



Relationships are KEY

- All positive mental health & well-being models include RELATIONSHIPS at the core, for example:
 - Well Aware Model, Dr. John Carney
 - Social Ecological Perspective on Resilience, Ungar
 - The tools of Encouragement, Timothy Evans
 - The circle of courage, Dr. Martin Brokenleg
 - Safe and Caring Schools and Communities



Relationships are KEY

When building relationships...seek first to understand.



Taking Attendance

- Taking a moment to acknowledge who is “HERE” rather than only noticing when someone is not present
 - Make eye contact
 - Take a moment to notice body language, facial expressions, level of engagement etc.



Strengths-Based Approach

- Leads with the positive and is based on the values of trust, respect, intentionality and optimism.
- When we start with a problem-orientation and a primary focus on risks, discipline and what students lack, we can easily lose sight of the need to build the positive foundation that will prevent problems, promote strengths and give all students the skills to deal with adversity and achieve well-being.



Strengths-Based Language

At-risk

Problems

Intervene

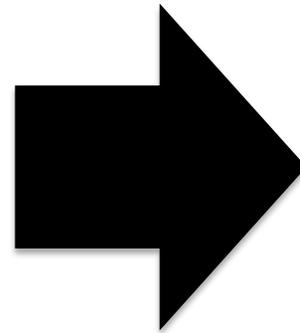
Discipline

Reform

Control

Fix

Exclusive



At-potential

Strengths

Engage

Celebrate

Adapt to

Empower

Support

Inclusive



The Power of a Circle

What does a circle represent?



The Power of a Circle

- Evidence-based practice
- The circle provides a respectful and supportive forum where students can learn about one another, develop an increased sense of community and respect, show empathy and caring and engage in problem solving.



More Ideas...

Healthy Active School Symposium



Healthy Active Schools Symposia

H A S S

What do you do with an idea?

Supporting Healthy School Communities
through Student Leadership

EverActive.org/HASS
@EverActiveAB
#EASHASS

Alberta Government

HPEC
Health & Physical
Education Council



More ideas....

Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club



More Ideas...

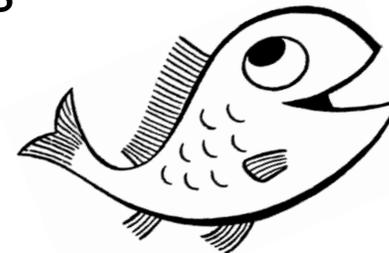
Student Connectedness:

- Bucket Filling
- Caught YA!
- Buddy Bench
- Buddy Classes / Cross-graded Homeroom
- School Themes
- Collaborative Art pieces
- Welcome Week / Welcome Committee
- Mentoring Opportunities



Fish Out of Water

- Great activity to do 1-2 months after school has begun (aka now!)
- Each student gets a fish (or otherwise) to put their name on and decorate
- Each fish is posted up at a staff meeting and staff walks around and initials the students they have a relationship with
- Students that have less than 3 signatures are assigned to an appropriate teacher/staff member and that teacher/staff member makes a intentional effort to cultivate relationship
- Showcase fish throughout the hallways



Connect with the Community

- Volunteer Opportunities
- Community Clean-up
- May-Day flowers for our neighbours

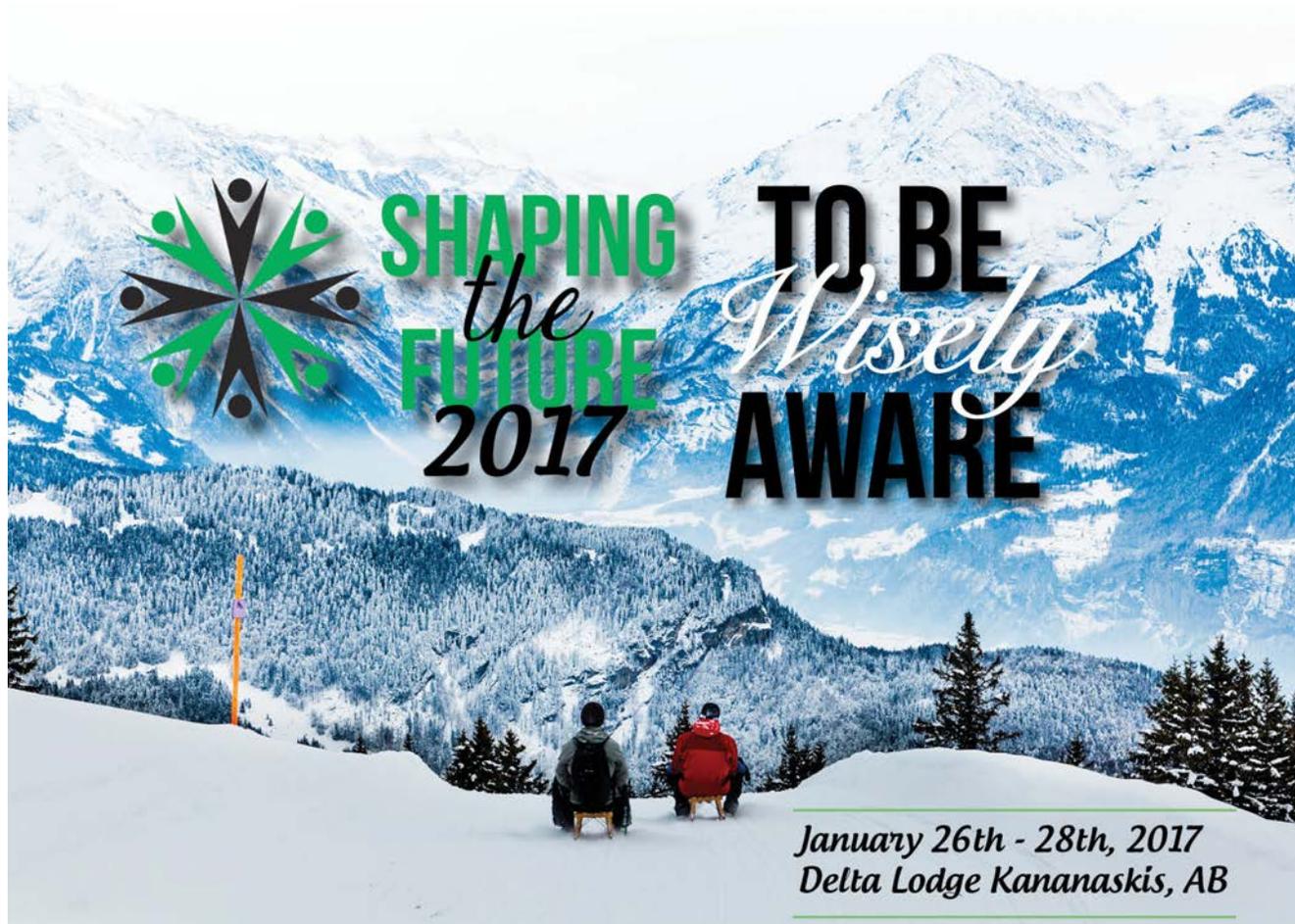


I commit to...

- Take out a piece of paper and divide it into 4 sections



Shaping the Future





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