

2021-2024 MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE STRATEGY

October 2021



Limestone
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

INTRODUCTION

Growing Mentally Healthy Schools

We're putting wellness first.

The Limestone District School Board is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee. We acknowledge their enduring presence on this land, as well as the presence of Métis, Inuit and other First Nations from across Turtle Island. We honour their cultures and celebrate their commitment to this land.

Mission: We prepare students within safe and inclusive environments to embrace a changing world as lifelong learners and informed, responsible citizens.

Stakeholders

A variety of stakeholder groups were engaged in multiple formats to enhance, reach and offer as much opportunity as possible for participation in the development of the 2021-2024 Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy. Stakeholders included:

- Students Grades 7-12
- Student Trustees
- Mental Health Leadership Committee
- Limestone families
- Special Education Advisory Committee
- Indigenous Education Advisory Committee
- Community partners
- Staff (administrators, educators and support staff)
- Unions and Federations
- Mental Health Lead
- Superintendent of Learning for All
- Senior Staff

OVERVIEW

The Limestone District School Board recognizes that schools play an essential role in the promotion of mental health and as such, has made a commitment to putting student well-being first. The 2021-2024 Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy offers six key areas of focus that promote good mental health among all students. These include: mental health and substance use knowledge, pathways to/through and from care, student mental health and substance use support, culturally-responsive mental health promotion, prevention and intervention, equipping and support staff, and a relationship-based approach to student well-being.

Equity

While mental health, equity and student achievement have always been important, there has never been a time when uniting these priorities has been more essential. Persistent exposure to discrimination and marginalization, may create trauma, which has a significant impact on one's mental health. Limestone District School Board is committed to providing environments in which all students can explore their diverse selves by identifying and removing barriers to success. In order to best support the mental health of students who traditionally have been marginalized in the education system we must first understand how long-term exposure to oppression and systemic racism contributes to negative mental health outcomes. Guided by the [Limestone Equity Action Plan](#), the board will work toward addressing inequitable and oppressive systems and policies that have traditionally marginalized students. Culturally responsive and relevant mental health and substance use supports will be made accessible so that all students may experience positive identity affirming mental health and well-being.

COVID-19 Pandemic

It is important to acknowledge that all students, families and school board staff have been navigating unprecedented circumstances throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As we learn more about the long-term impacts of this pandemic on children's mental health, we will work closely with our community partners to ensure that students receive mental health and substance use supports as needed.



MENTAL HEALTH & ACHIEVEMENT

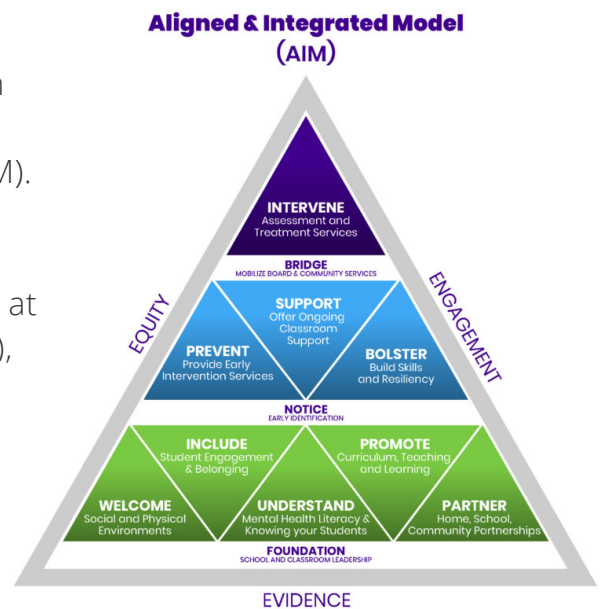
Schools are an ideal place for the promotion, prevention and early intervention for mental health and substance use issues. Through an evidence-based and systematic approach, we can help students flourish, both academically and with their well-being. School and classroom environments have an important impact on a student's sense of belonging and overall mental health. Maintaining positive relationships with students within a caring school community and safe, welcoming, inclusive classrooms, contributes to students' social-emotional wellness and readiness to learn.



Despite our best efforts to create mentally healthy schools, there will always be some students who struggle with a mental health problem. When students are struggling with mental illness, it is critical to engage services provided within a community or healthcare setting. By creating mentally healthy school environments, introducing high-quality mental health promotion, offering prevention and early intervention services, and ensuring a safety net for students who are struggling with mental health problems, schools can support students and families within a circle of support to, through and from community-based care (*School Mental Health Ontario*).

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

School Mental Health Ontario depicts the continuum of various supports and services within the school setting using the Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM). This model helps to organize mental health promotion efforts offered in a universal way for all students (Tier 1), services for students who may be at risk and needing targeted skill development (Tier 2), and supports for students who have a diagnosable mental health problem who need treatment and ongoing care (Tier 3).



Foundational Principles

Through consultation with stakeholders, Limestone has identified four foundational principles which support the mental health and substance use prevention, promotion and intervention work in schools.



Engagement - Optimizing student and family voice, engagement and leadership to enhance momentum in school mental health.



Organizational Conditions - Structures and processes that serve to enhance uptake, implementation, scalability and sustainability of evidence-base practices in school mental health to enhance system coherence.



Equity - Responsive supports and resources co-designed and co-delivered alongside specific student populations with greater or unique mental health needs to enhance equity in service delivery.



Evidence - Sustainable implementation of mental health promotion, prevention and intervention practices that are both evidence-based and implementation sensitive to enhance the quality of mental health programming in schools (*School Mental Health Ontario*).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Limestone District School Board is committed to centring student voice. Understanding student perspective is needed to support a positive approach to student mental health and substance use. We heard from more than 1300 Grade 7 to 12 students, via online survey. Students reported who they seek support from at school and their ideas about their school's needs and strengths engaging with student mental health, substance use and well-being. Surveys were developed in partnership with our Student Trustees and the *Mental Health Leadership Committee*.



To help us understand how students' diverse lived experiences are tied to mental health and substance use, students were asked their self-identified race, sexual orientation and gender. Knowing how racialized and marginalized students experience mental health and substance use services is critical to advancing equitable practices within the board.

Limestone families and staff were also engaged via online survey. Their responses regarding the board's strengths and needs have been analyzed separately to differentiate between student and adult priorities, and also in combination with student responses to develop a holistic understanding of how mental health, substance use and well-being affects all members of a school community. Focus groups were also held with frontline mental health staff to help better understand how services are delivered to students. All data collection and analysis was led by the Research and Data Analyst at Educational Services.

The results of this combined analysis are six areas of focus to inform school mental health and substance use work in the board over the next three years. We look forward to continuing to work alongside students, families, and community partners to bring these recommendations to fruition.

Student Survey Snapshot

WHAT WE HEARD

Students were asked **who they turn to at school** when they need support or information on mental health.

50%
turn to a friend

21%
turn to a teacher

13% of respondents **don't feel like they can talk to anyone** at school about mental health.

more than

1300

Grade 7 to 12 students responded



408

Elementary



904

Secondary

Students were asked what their school **could do better** to support student mental health, substance use issues and well-being. The most common answer was

TALK

about it more



Students appreciate



- Talking openly about mental health at school
- Check-ins from staff
- Knowing who and where their supports are

Students want more open conversations

about

substance use



Family & Staff
Survey Snapshot

WHAT WE HEARD

936 families
responded to the survey

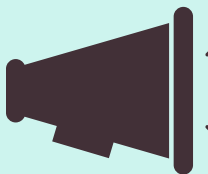


Families recognize that **supportive staff and safe, caring environments** promote good mental health at school.



Families asked for **more communication** about support services offered at their student's school.

537 staff responded to the survey



Staff appreciate the board's **positive mental health messaging**.



Staff asked to be **equipped with the tools and resources** to do this work.



Staff want students and families to have **easy access to information, resources, and services**.

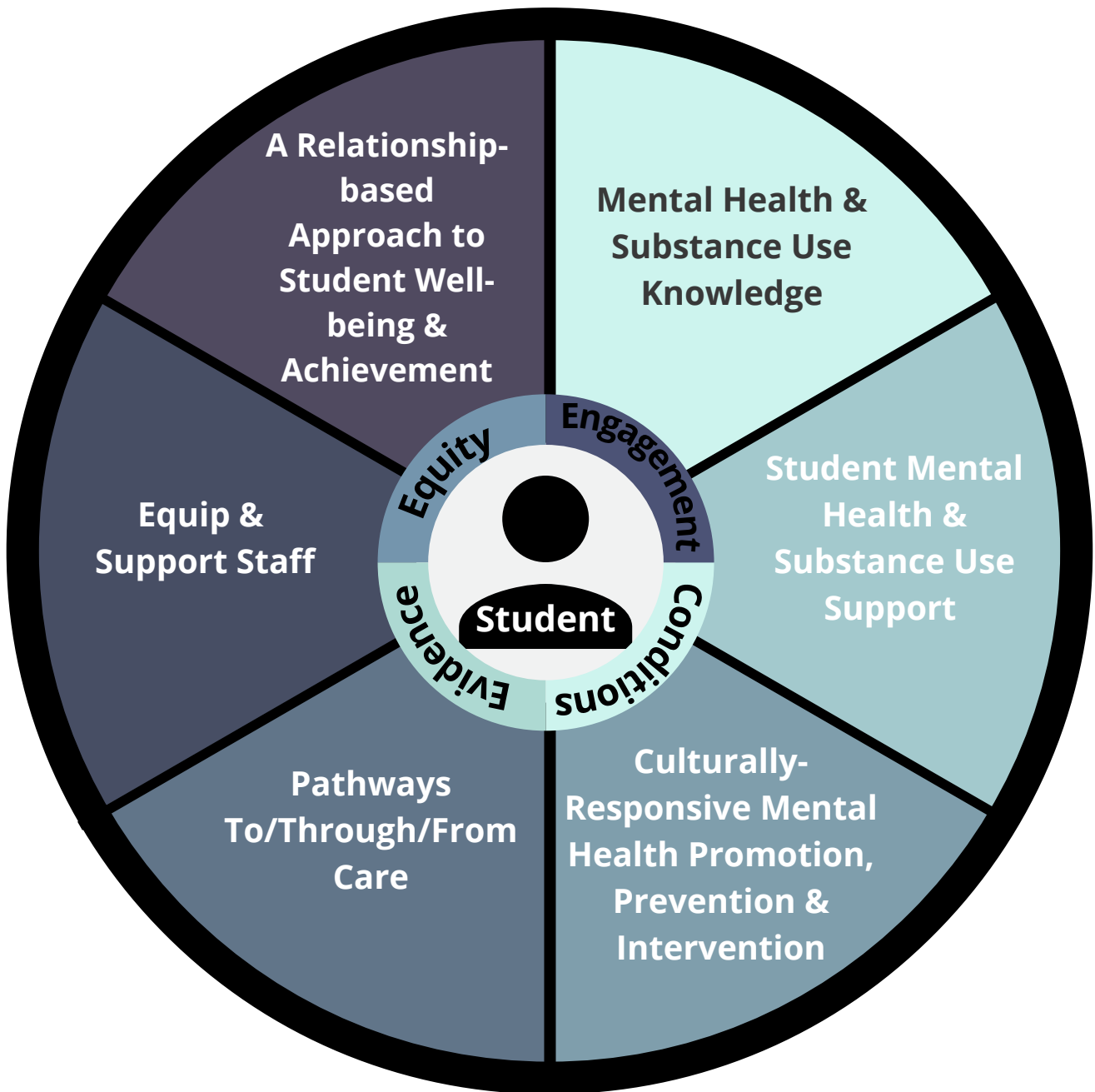
Families and staff said that students

need more mental health and substance use education at school



2021-2024 MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE STRATEGY

Students are at the centre of all mental health and substance use promotion, prevention and intervention efforts. Supported by the four foundational principles of engagement, organizational conditionals, equity, and evidence, Limestone has identified six areas of focus that promote good mental health among all students.



2021-2024 ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

Mental Health and Substance Use Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote student mental health and substance use literacy, help-seeking & peer help-giving • Students learn skills that help them to identify emotions and cope with stress • Communication and resources for caregivers and families to support student mental health and substance use
Student Mental Health & Substance Use Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure students receive timely and responsive evidence-based prevention and intervention services at school • Students and families know where to turn for more intensive support when needed • Ongoing learning for system/school leaders, educators and mental health support staff to reinforce mentally healthy systems, schools and classrooms
Culturally-Responsive Mental Health Promotion, Prevention & Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health resources and supports that prioritize the voices and experiences of students from racialized, marginalized and underserved groups • Ongoing learning, resources and supports to assist staff with effective implementation of culturally-responsive social emotional learning at school • Ongoing training in evidence-based, culturally-responsive promotion, prevention and early intervention protocols
Pathways To/Through/ From Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention programming • Ongoing work in supporting school pathways • Collaborative initiatives with community mental health and substance use partners and cultural organizations to strengthen the framework for effective tiered support for children, youth and families
Equip and Support Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-specific professional learning along a continuum from mental health and substance use awareness through to expertise • Familiarize staff with evidence-based resources designed to promote good mental health and address student substance use, that connects to the delivery of classroom curriculum
A Relationship-based Approach to Student Well-being and Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and sustain environments that simultaneously support well-being and achievement • Promote learning through the context of relationships

NEXT STEPS



Limestone District School Board is committed to monitoring this strategy through the development of annual action plans. These plans will set out goals within each area of focus that the board will endeavor to implement and monitor throughout the year. The plan which is created by the Mental Health Lead and Superintendent of Mental Health, and reviewed annually by the Mental Health Leadership Committee. Annual actions plans will take emerging evidence into account, including the results of the [2020 Student Census](#).

Learn more at limestone.on.ca



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