

MENTAL HEALTH, SAFE & CARING SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

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This issue of Health & Learning includes articles that focus on mental health and schools. I am glad to see them because we need to be more aware of how our students are dealing with life's challenges and stresses. However, we must be sure to draw a few lines in the proverbial sand so that teachers are not yet again asked to be miracle workers.

First, the increased attention being paid to mental health problems and the development of better school-linked services for mental illnesses is very positive. Teachers have long recognized the importance of early identification of mental health problems and referrals as well as the need to teach young people how to deal with stress and to help others through rough times.

Canadian Association for School Health in this publication and other activities. These have included webinars, an annual symposium, a Community of Practice and even a wiki-based Web site.

I was also pleased to read the first article in this issue by Meldrum, Venn and Kutcher. They present a good comprehensive approach that includes better teaching, but also includes health services from outside the school. I also appreciate that they have tied mental health to the core function of schools: teaching and learning.

However, as we move forward to improve mental health through school-linked and school-based actions, let us not attempt to reinvent any wheels. The knowledge about social intelligence has

already been incorporated into effective social and emotional learning programs. The asset-based approach developed by the Search Institute in the United States has already been adapted here in Canada. Resilience theory offers new insight about some students who make it through life's challenges, but we already know (attachment theory, social reasoning, social influences) that connectedness to school, parents and trusted adults is critical.

The Canadian responses to violence, crime and bullying have already included attention to caring and positive school climates, so we need not develop new paradigms for promoting respect, tolerance and cohesion among students and staff just because we now have one more reason (mental health) to support those effective school policies and practices.

Most importantly, we know that teachers care deeply about their students. Our

hearts rise, ache and sink with their successes, stresses and mishaps. As we incorporate mental health concerns and programs into the fabric of our schools, let us not ask teachers to substitute for the absences of parents, family or community members in the lives of our students by caring more or caring differently. Instead, let us focus on good programs, integrate agency and professional services closely with educators' efforts, and ensure that peers, parents and other mentors are available to help.

We are also pleased to see that the Mental Health Commission of Canada will be including schools as part of its mental health reform agenda. The Canadian Teachers' Federation is part of a wide-ranging consortium responding to the Commission's call for proposals.

We have also been pleased to publicize a variety of activities that address mental health in schools through our partnership with the

