



Canadian Teachers' Federation

Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants

December 1, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

As you prepare for the upcoming First Ministers' meeting and the rich dialogue at this important gathering, I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) to urge a focus on child and youth mental health. In 2014, CTF surveyed over 5000 Canadian teachers regarding their top priorities; 95% of respondents rated child and youth mental health as their top concern. This is a staggering, yet all too believable, response that should not be ignored.

When you meet the First Ministers, CTF asks you, on behalf of the 231,000 teachers we represent and the millions of students they teach, to provide for adequate mental health care for children and youth in a renewed Health Accord. At the present time, despite Canada's relative international prosperity and progressive values, many Canadian communities lack adequate resources to provide the preventative and interceptive resources needed to support child and youth mental health and well-being. In isolated communities and for minority populations, the challenges are often further exacerbated by distance, linguistic barriers, and lack of understanding about culture or group.

CTF and its provincial and territorial Member organizations would welcome the opportunity to participate with governments at all levels in discussions about improvements to mental health services for children and youth. Children and youth in Canada have a right to health care and that must include readily accessible mental health care.

In 2012, in collaboration with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, CTF explored the issue of mental health and well-being in schools through a pan-Canadian survey. Over 3,900 teachers responded to the survey including 2,324 elementary school teachers and 1,603 secondary school teachers. The purpose of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the classroom teacher perspective on issues related to student mental health and well-being in Canadian schools, including factors that act as potential barriers to the provision of mental health services for students in their schools (such as stigma for example).

2490 Don Reid • Ottawa • ON • K1H 1E1 • Tel./Tél. 613-232-1505 • Fax 613-232-1886 • info@ctf-fce.ca • www.ctf-fce.ca

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Barriers identified in the 2012 CTF survey included the following:

- 85% of teachers agreed that a lack of funding for school-based mental health services was a potential barrier, including 59% who “strongly” agreed;
- 78% of teachers agreed that an insufficient number of community-based mental health professionals was a potential barrier, including 45% who “strongly” agreed;
- Three quarters of teachers (75%) agreed that a lack of coordinated services between the school and community was a potential barrier, including 38% who “strongly” agreed;
- Two thirds of teachers (67%) agreed that a lack of referral options in the community was a potential barrier, including 34% who “strongly” agreed.

One teacher respondent summed up the situation we know too well:

It is sad when you know there is a concern, or the student tells you there is a concern, you've followed the proper protocols, and for whatever reason (lack of services, family declines services for child, fear of stigma, etc.) the student does not get the help they need.

CTF and its 17 Member organizations in each province and territory would welcome opportunities for further dialogue and collaboration to help all Canadian children and youth lead healthy lives in order to achieve their full potential. We wish you a very successful First Ministers' Meeting and sincerely hope that the mental health and well-being of Canadian children and youth will feature prominently in your deliberations and, ultimately, in a new Health Accord.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather Smith". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Heather Smith,
President, Canadian Teachers' Federation

cc: Provincial and Territorial Premiers
CTF Board of Directors