

Regina Catholic Schools: Mental Wellness

Catholic Schools work very hard to help their students and staff grow spiritually, intellectually, physically and emotionally. Unfortunately, the extremely hurried pace of life and resulting stress that many of our students and staff face, can hinder that growth. That is why over the past several years, Regina Catholic Schools has made a concerted effort to help students and staff achieve mental wellness.

Mental wellness is a biblical injunction whose roots go back to Creation story in Genesis. We are commanded by God to cease our labours-our hurried, stressful pace of life-for one day a week so that we may be rejuvenated spiritually, physically and mentally. At RCSD's annual administrator's retreat held in August 2019, our school division's leaders were reminded to practice Sabbath spirituality so that they might be mentally well and, in turn, help others to be mentally well.

These Catholic leaders are working hard within their own schools to promote mental wellness. They use the Our School Data pertaining to stress, anxiety and a sense of belonging to create action plans to support students' sense of belonging and well-being. Some of the mental health initiatives that our schools have implemented in response to this data include: 1) mindfulness minutes, 2) guest speakers on mental health issues. 3) Student retreats that focus on positive coping strategies. 4) Meditation. 5) High School SRC's observing Mental Health Week to raise awareness of mental health and to promote mental health literacy. 6) Student and staff participation in Understand Us which is a volunteer initiative to combat the stigma of mental illness.

Let's take a deeper dive into two mental health initiatives in Regina Catholic Schools-one at elementary and one at high school.

At St. Gregory School, teacher Brett Matlock and his grade 7/8 class have been leaders in the Understand Us initiative for the past 7 years. So impressive is the work that Brett and his students have done to combat the stigma surrounding mental illness that one of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses' documentaries on mental health featured Brett and his class. An excerpt from this documentary was aired frequently across Saskatchewan as a public service announcement on CTV, CBC and Global. We are justifiably proud of Brett and his students.

We are also proud of what is happening at Dr. Martin LeBoldus Catholic High School. It is one of 3 pilot sites for the **Building Mental Health Capacity Program** which is a joint initiative between the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministry of Health. This program provides funding for a Wellness Coordinator and Wellness Promoter. The Wellness Coordinator works with staff to educate them on mental health literacy and to integrate resources and instruction into the classroom. The Wellness Promoter works directly with students running lunch hour and after school activities and facilitating programs in the classroom.

The **Building Mental Health Capacity Program** also sponsored two camps: one for elementary students in July and one for grade 8 students in August to prepare them for high school transition and the stresses they might face. In addition, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has

paired with Regina Catholic schools to sponsor a Regina Catholic Youth Anti-stigma Summit a one day workshop for high school students which was held in October.

To assist staff in helping students achieve mental wellness, our school division had Dr. Andrew Baxter, a psychologist deliver a keynote presentation on **Mental Health Literacy** and a breakout session on **Understanding Stress and the Teenage brain** at our October 2010 Institute. Several other breakout sessions focused on mental health were also offered to both teachers and support staff at the Institute.

Through these mental health initiatives, Regina Catholic Schools is helping students and staff grow in all aspects of their lives so that they may “Let their light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)