

School Mental Health Plan

2021-2022

School Mental Health Team

Counselor: Kim Engler and Kim Van Steenis

LST: Kim Engler

Instructional Coach: Jody Waechter

Universal supports (MHCB): Angela DeFrancesco

MHCB: Cherie Corcoran and MHCB Team

Admin support: Theo Dykstra

AHS Mental Health Nurse: Erin Williams

Complex Needs team: Jody Waechter, Jessica Raham, Darlene Kowalchuk, Maren Barrows

Others: (e.g. Mental Health Nurse, parents, students, FCSS out of Leduc)

School Context:

Population: 190 students, with 187 students choosing in-class learning and 3 students choosing distance learning. Our population is fairly evenly split between Junior and Senior High School; 90 students in grades 7-9, and 100 students in grades 10-12. 11.5 certificated teaching staff, 6.5 Educational Assistants (4.0 FTE tagged to students with complex needs, 1.0 FTE for general classroom support from inclusive education, and 1.5 FTE support through Jordan's Principle), 0.5 Librarian (also used as a reader), 1.5 secretarial, and 2 custodians.

Diversity: Wide socio-economic backgrounds, a mixture of town-based and agricultural families who are primarily of European descent, with ~15% of our population identified as First Nation, Metis, and Inuit. ~12% of our students have an academic coding (as mentioned four of those students are coded as severe/complex.)

2021-2022 Focus: Building resiliency within our school community in a TES aware environment

The last 3 years have been incredibly challenging. After the death of our grade 9 student during the spring of 2019, it became apparent that our school community needed help for students and staff to continue to heal, build capacity and resiliency. Our initial overall goals then generalized to Supporting Mental Health. At the time we thought that was the biggest challenge we would face in the near future. Since that time, a great deal of effort has been put into increasing awareness of mental health and mental illness, as well as increased education on the topic for staff members and an emphasis on communication among students and staff members. Just when we felt that we were starting to gain ground on this as a staff early in 2020, COVID struck and changed the way we were planning to roll out the rest of that year and had significant impacts on the way we operated for last year.

This year we will continue to work with our students on building resiliency, also continuing healing from the loss of a classmate and the abrupt loss of the normalcy of the intervening school years. As the pandemic continues we are seeing the impacts of it in feelings of being overwhelmed, ongoing increased anxiety, fear that we will return to online learning, and loss of hope that things will return to the fun times that students remember having before this began. This along with new visionary leadership has led to the initial steps of shifting the focal lens of the school to a Trauma-Informed System under the training of the TES model.

As the individual support system for our students, counselors, and staff have spent a great deal of time working one on one with students to help them navigate a variety of interpersonal situations and working on coping with stress as well as referring them to specialized support through AHS and private counseling. We feel that the best way to support our students is to work with them, building relationships that can then foster a positive mental health environment and help them make good decisions about their mental health, anxiety levels, and risk factors prior to crisis points. Having “a person” in the building is integral for every student to realize this goal. The role of being “the person” is taken on by many staff members, many of which are trained in Go-To Educator Mental Health Literacy. We work together to help students find success and avoid some of the pitfalls that may present themselves especially in this new higher stress, long-term pandemic environment.

Guiding Principles:

What are we currently doing to build resilience and positive mental health for our students?

Universal: The application of universal support has begun to return to normal as COVID protocols have shifted. Although we try to keep the Junior Highs contained within one wing and the Senior high kids in the other, there is the ability for some heterogeneous division level groups. We can still no longer have the whole school assemblies, full school competitions, dances, unpackaged food sharing, or other things that helped make school a fun and exciting place to be, but we have been able to have some resurgence of extracurricular clubs and sports teams. Working within this framework but still being creative and offering opportunities and support to the students has continued to be somewhat challenging.

The MHCBS Success Coach, Angela DeFrancesco provides presentations to all health classes (still cohorted) on a variety of topics including mind up training, online behavior, bullying, relationships, Stress Busters, Brain Smoothie. Students Union has begun running again. Although still somewhat scaled back from previous years due to covid limitations, SU members are excited and actively looking for ways to build positive school culture.

We have had a relationship-focused approach for the last few years. 3 years ago, all teachers at that time were trained as Go-To mental health educators, with one becoming a trainer. All teachers continue to spend a great deal of time in the school, building relationships with students so that they feel they have an advocate among the teaching staff. Staff is also actively trying to teach students how to set and maintain healthy boundaries. We are also looking to switch modalities from our full-day, mental health day, to integrate small events/inclusions into classes throughout the school year.

We have been able to reopen portions of our breakfast program; addressing the needs of approximately 50 students a day. Although COVID made us rethink the way we were providing this service last year, we feel that it is important for these students to start the day with something in their system. The breakfast program window is open in the morning this year and we are able to provide fresh fruit, prepackaged items, and bottles of water.

Targeted:

As well as the universal supports mentioned above, MHCBS Success Coach Angela DeFrancesco is working within the individual grades to provide targeted supports that are geared toward the needs of a more limited group, such as, Second Step programming with our grade 8 class, or Coping with stress in some other grades. Although it has become impossible (currently) to do cross-grade groups, we have carved out a bit of time for Angela to meet with some groups individually outside of their main grade cohort, such as the Grade 10 girls group.

We have also had class-specific presentations from AHS, Saffron, and MADD to extend the curriculum that they are learning in the classroom.

Individual/Specialized: (e.g. Mental Health Nurse, MH Therapist, BGRD Psychologist)

We had a number of students who worked one on one with Kim Engler (TJSHS Counsellor) last year since making the move to a MHCBS universal support model last year. Engler and other staff meet with those students to work on building resiliency and capacity in an as-needed capacity. Kim Engler and Kim van Steenis meet with students to provide emotional, guidance and academic support. Increased communication with the home for a number of students is an important element of our wrap-around support. We have a number of students across grades who are using a "Tap out" system in class when they need to access a quiet area to regulate, although with COVID we have had to have a more planned approach when we do this as space is limited. We have continued to work closely with Erin Williams to provide best practice support for students who have additional mental health concerns. Other students and their families have been referred to Erin Black. Jordan's Principle has been supportive of providing Educational Assistants for students who qualify and this has provided a great deal of relief for our staff and students.

Where are the gaps in services for students?

Universal: Our gaps in service that we are trying to close and compensate for have arisen due to the COVID pandemic and the need for increased protocols to ensure safety. It has taken a significant toll on our social system and school culture. We are trying to find ways to encourage student participation in fun school wide activities but it has been somewhat slow to resume. We are seeing an increase in anxiety (clinical), eating disorders, and depression among the student population. Staff is suffering from the effects of teaching through the pandemic and multiple traumatic events that have occurred. Overall staff is reporting that they are less well than previous and I fear that potentially many are focussing on support of students but neglecting their own wellbeing. This may lead to burnout.

Targeted: We are seeing increased need in our grade 7 class for programming around positive socialization and bullying. There have been many reported interactions of students name-calling, touching (kicking, poking) each other. As a class they are presenting as younger students than typical and will require support as they re-acclimate to the in school atmosphere. Following the injury in shop class and trauma for those who witnessed it, we are adjusting shop capacity numbers and we are providing additional mental health support for those that are struggling with what happened.

Individual/Specialized: Our community still relies heavily on AHS for mental health support. The addition of the Wednesday afternoon walk-in sessions and Leduc Mental health has provided some relief. Many of our families can not afford to access private support (or even the gas money to drive to larger centers) without assistance and the wait times for these supports can be extremely long. We also struggle with access to these services as counseling services in the town are limited.

What do we plan to do for the 2021-2022 school year to build resilience and positive mental health for our students?

Universal: Our new mantra has become “it is ok not to be ok” and we are supporting our students around that premise. The staff is dedicated and committed to presenting an environment for the students that although still not “normal” contains as many elements of normalcy and fun that help to alleviate the stress of school. Our Principal, Theo Dykstra has been turning attention to student behavior being a form of communication to help staff understand how we can help these students with specific triggers and self-regulation, communication while still holding them accountable for their actions.

Targeted: Much the same as our universal plan, the use of what we would normally present to all of the classes, more tailored to the needs of particular groups. Small groups have been effective in our grade 10 class, and we are going to continue that program with a Jr. Girls group, expanding into other groups. This gives the students a chance to learn specific strategies in a safe and supportive environment.

Individual/Specialized: Counsellors continue to work on PD involving the support of students. Counselors have an open door policy for any student in need during the school year.

Areas of Need for Consideration in:

What is needed to best support our school community?

- Students need someone to talk to; sometimes to listen to their concerns and help them formulate the best approach to tackle them, sometimes to provide a supportive shoulder. We are often limited by working within the school sphere but not having a community counterpart that can support families outside of school hours.

Who can help support these areas of need?

- School Counsellors, Wellness Coaches, teachers, FCSS (currently Leduc until Thorsby hires a new person)

How will this be accomplished?

- Counselors are available throughout the day for students who need support or are in crisis and if outside of assigned time, have their classes covered by other staff members. MHCB Team provides seminars and presentations for students (media, test anxiety, Mind Up, wellness topics), AHS possibly providing info sessions (vaping, party program).

Professional Development for school staff?

- Staff would like to continue to do PD around Mental Health and overall wellness. I would like to focus this on their wellness and practice, but we will see how that goes. Examples that have been popular previously: Jodi Carrington, Gordon Neufeld, First Aid, Mental Health Awareness, VTRA, TES. Counselors are constantly working to expand their knowledge of best practices for helping students within the school.

Where does our Mental Health Plan fit in the scope of Comprehensive School Health?

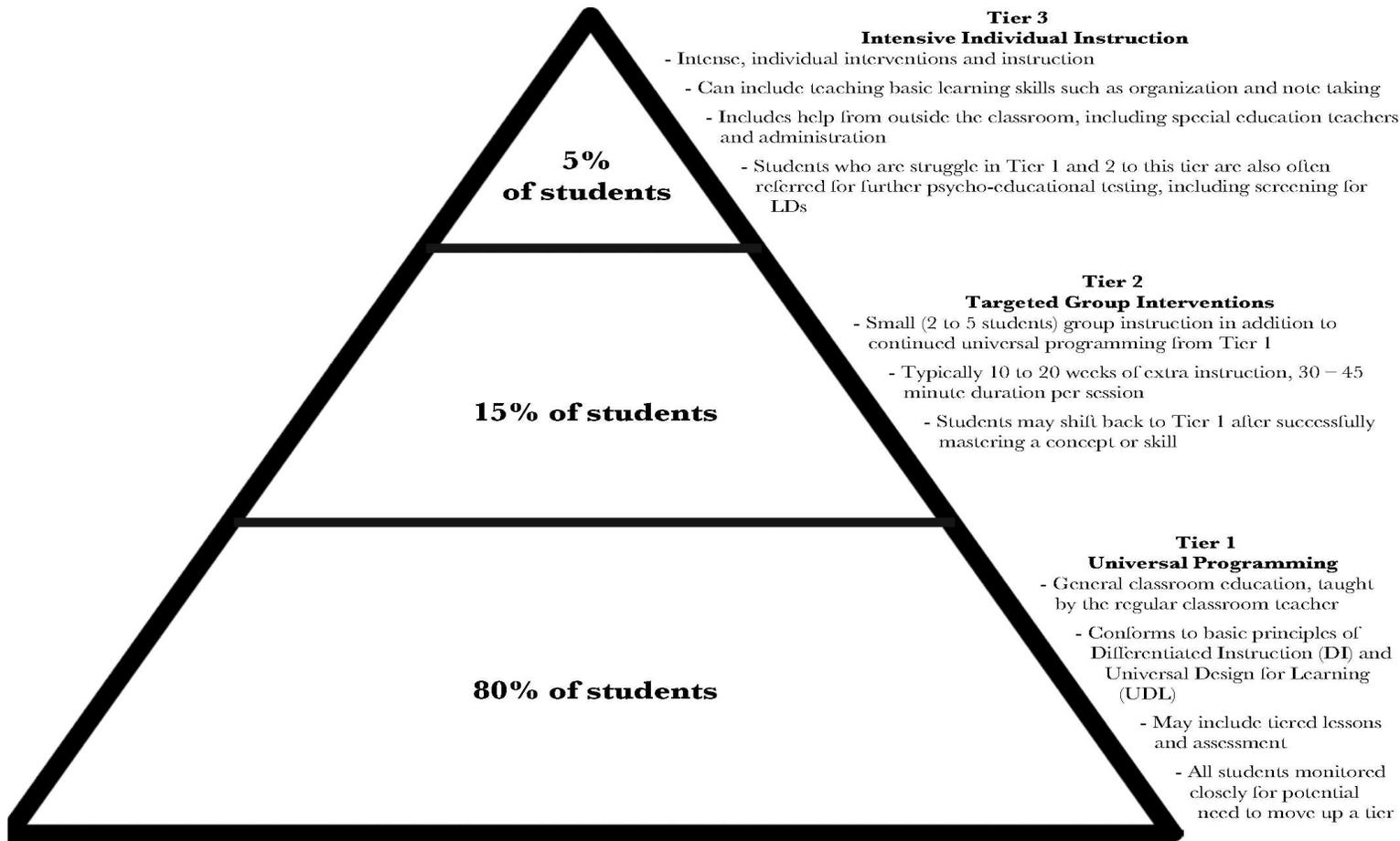
Although Throsby Junior-Senior High School incorporates all of these areas as often as possible, our current 2021-2022 Mental Health plan focuses most on Positive School Climate to support the mental health of our students.

Comprehensive School Health	Mental Health Plan
<p>Active Living:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily opportunities for phys ed ● Encourage students to go outside and move around during lunch ● Team opportunities ● Non-team-based opportunities 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual ● Family support ● Groups (must be limited to cohorted groups only due to COVID) ● Grade-level ● Classroom ● School-wide
<p>Healthy Eating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Healthy choices ● Healthy alternatives (Snack attack, providing snacks and small lunch items for students who do not have any. Run out of the office) ● Breakfast Club (now available through baskets in the classrooms, distributed by staff and replenished daily) 	<p>Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Navigating services ● Parent Information Nights (virtual due to COVID) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Online/Social media awareness ○ Parenting teens ○ Anxiety and Depression ○ Substance use
<p>Positive School Climate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School-wide activities, done within cohorts and shared afterward (theme days, Halloween) ● Supporting Positive Peer relationships ● Staff/student relationships (sometimes with Mediation) 	<p>School Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional Development ● Mental Health Days

2021-2022 Goals/Mental Health Plan:

(e.g. To create and sustain a solid foundational, proactive Mental Health Plan to ensure we are not just moving from crisis to crisis)

Goals	Delivery/activities	Roles and Responsibilities	Timeline
Organization of Mental Health Seminars	Class seminars for students, geared toward positive mental health and wellness.	Contacting Speakers for Seminars: Kim Engler Support and contacts: Cherie Corcoran Angela DeFrancesco Organizing Mental Events, broken throughout the year: Kim Engler and Theo Dykstra	October 2021 - Ongoing Meetings with groups on Fridays.
Supporting Staff and students in a more stressful and anxiety-producing environment	Slowing down when possible to prevent students from getting overwhelmed Taking time as a staff to talk and check in with each other; Do nice things for each other Looking for wellness activities for staff that they will participate in	THS School Staff: 23 staff members Being extra aware and cognizant of what is going on and of our own well-being.	2021-2022
Increasing face time with students who need support to increase their resiliency	Create more availability for students. Open office hours often during the day.	Emotional and Academic Guidance/Post-Secondary Counselling: Kim Engler and Kim van Steenis	October 2021 - ongoing
To educate and encourage an active Trauma-Informed mindset among staff members	Searching for PD around this for staff members. Looking for teachable moments to guide staff in Trauma-informed interactions	WIST looking for PD: Kim Engler Support and Contacts: Niki Gill, Cherie Corcoran, Jon Ganton	September 2021 - Ongoing



Role of Various Support Positions for Schools

<p>Learning Support Teachers</p>	<p>Role: Coordination of services (e.g. referrals, resources, etc) and <u>intervention for students</u> (e.g.academic support, behaviour support plans)</p>
<p>Counselors</p>	<p>Role: facilitated the development of a <i>School-Wide Mental Health Plan</i>; coordinate universal mental health and career development support for ALL students. NOTE: Individual/personal counseling may be part of the Counsellor’s role depending on FTE allocated for Counselling at the school level and level of counselor training.</p>
<p>Family School Liaison Workers</p>	<p>Role: Universal mental wellness promotion and targeted solution-focused interventions (groups, individuals); resources for school staff and families; liaise with other community-based services; help track/support students in care (Success in School Plans).</p>
<p>Mental Health Capacity Building Coordinator</p>	<p>Role: Provide leadership, direction, and structure to support the overall vision, mission, and objectives of the MHCB Initiative.</p>
<p>Other Mental Health Services: Mental Health Nurse, Mental Health Therapist</p>	<p>Role (Nurse): Consultation with staff and parents regarding the management of psychotropic medication and coordination of mental health services. Role (Therapist): Clinic-based therapy for children/youth.</p>
<p>Instructional Consultants/Coaches</p>	<p>Role: Provide a variety of services for schools as required in support of student learning and development: coaching, consulting, resources, professional learning workshops, case conferences, etc. Assist school-based leads in accessing other services as appropriate including psychoeducational assessments.</p>
<p>Other Consulting Services: Psychology, Speech-Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Blind and Low Vision, Educational Audiology, Alternative and Augmentative Communication, Assistive Technology</p>	<p>Role: Provide a variety of services for schools as required in support of student learning and development: coaching, consulting, resources, professional learning workshops, case conferences, etc.</p>