

A Call to Action:
Ministry of Education's Grants for Student Needs: Student Mental Health and Well-Being Bundle

At the start of the school year, many stakeholders are trying to understand how Covid-19 school closures will affect student mental health.

Students are entering another school year with the threat of more disruption.

The purpose of my presentation today is to ensure that leaders in the TCDSB take full advantage of the government funding being offered through the Grants for Student Needs: Mental Health and Well-Being Bundle.

We all know that bullying, for example, is a way for children to externalize their own stress. Bullies usually target the vulnerable along themes of race, body shape, competition either academically or socially, gender, or sexual orientation.

This is discouraging and even devastating for teachers, administrators, and system leaders who have worked so hard to push an equity, diversity and inclusion agenda.

The problem with the agenda is that it is challenging for teachers to sustain the message.

We have Pink T-shirt Day, or National Anti-Bullying Awareness Week, but how do we sustain and really teach our students?

In 2020, The Ministry of Education issued Regulation. 489 called "GRANTS FOR STUDENT NEEDS" for learning recovery and renewal amidst Covid-19 pandemic.

In January 2021, the Ontario Catholic School Board's Trustees Association cited the needs of "differentiated funding to address the growing influx of special needs students and students with mental health challenges."

Fortunately The May 4, 2021, Memo "B08" from Andrew Davis, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, authorized that the Grants for Student Needs program is continued for this school year.

The Minister of Education has asked school boards to address the topics of student mental health and well-being prior to the start of student instruction.

Adrianna McQuaid Submission for September 2, 2021 TCDDSB Boarding Meeting, Self-Representing

\$120,600 funding has been allocated to TCDSB or \$615 per the Board's 196 schools, or \$1.34 per student allocated to elementary and secondary principals to spend at their discretion.

So the question I am wondering about is:
Is the funding sufficient?
How are we going to spend the funding?

How are we going to teach students what is really important?
And what is important?
It's teaching them how to love to love themselves, and how to love others.

Here is 4 practical ways that Principals can improve student mental health:

1. Encourage religion teachers to incorporate a dynamic and impassioned narrative of love in their religion classes, including healing and forgiveness for our history with FNMI, members of the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups.
2. Empower homeroom teachers or Language Arts teachers to engage in programs that promote Social & Emotional Learning and the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Agenda, such as TRIBES or any of the excellent SEL listed on the TCDSB's website section on Student Mental Health.
3. Encourage teachers to offer Extra-Curricular After-School or Lunchtime Clubs for student engagement, especially the Respecting Differences Club or the Gay-Straight Alliance.

I speak as a concerned parent with a son and a daughter in the school board, as a teacher with over 10 years' experience teaching Gr. 4 to 12, 6 years' experience as a VP, and a shortlisted candidate for a VP in the TCDSB.

I commend the TCDSB for the SMH resources online. I cannot thank the Guidance and Administration staff of Loretto Abbey Catholic School for their help last year.

In closing, we already know that academic knowledge, achievement, and skills alone will not get our kids through life. Academic skill does not breed emotional resilience.

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Knowing how to give and receive love, will.

I know it is an impossible task. Some say that is not the school's job. But TCDSB community has a moral imperative to socialize its students in Christ-like fashion.

To quote the words of St. Paul: "And though I have the power of prophecy, to penetrate all mysteries and knowledge, and though I have all the faith necessary to move mountains -- if I am without love, I am nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:2.

Thank you.

Adrianna McQuaid