

OCSTA MOTION

MOVED BY: Maria Rizzo

**Subject: Addressing Rising Mental Health
Crisis Facing Children and Youth in
Ontario**

WHEREAS: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected society in many ways, especially the most vulnerable in our communities; and

WHEREAS: Children and youth have been greatly affected by school closures, isolation from peers and other supports, disconnection from community and by the on-going changes to the way in which they attended school and as a result, we continue to witness the devastating impact that COVID-19 has placed on the health and well-being of children and youth; and

WHEREAS: According to the Children's Mental Health Association, approximately 70 percent of mental illnesses can be diagnosed before the age of 25. This makes adolescence a critical time for mental health promotion and prevention, including early identification, and effective treatment of mental disorders; and

WHEREAS: Mental illness is increasingly threatening the lives of our children; with Canada's youth suicide rate being the third highest in the industrialized world. According to data from Statistics Canada, suicide remains a leading cause of death among children and adolescents aged 10-14, and the second leading cause of death for youth aged 15 to 24. We know that for Black and Indigenous youth these numbers are far greater; and

WHEREAS: While it is acknowledged that the Government of Ontario has made some investments to address youth mental health, but more is desperately needed to deal with this urgent crisis.

1. Mandatory Mental Health Literacy in the Curriculum

WHEREAS: The Ministry of Education has committed to mandatory learning on mental health literacy for Grade 10 students to start in fall 2024 and will include how to recognize signs of being overwhelmed or struggling, as well as where to find help locally when needed. This is needed throughout a child's academic journey and not just in Grade ten.

2. Additional Mental Health Support for students

WHEREAS: The Government of Ontario provide additional funding for school mental health clinicians, and student support staff, such as mental health professionals, school

psychologists, child & youth workers, social workers, nurses, guidance counsellors, and mental health crisis intervention workers. The current ratio of social worker/child and youth worker to student, school psychologist to student, guidance counsellor to student and mental health worker to student exceeds the recommended average of 1:250, 1:700 and 1:375 respectively.

3. Collection and Reporting of Data on Mental Health health Supports and Services in Schools

WHEREAS: Currently, there is a lack of publicly available data, therefore, we are asking for a province-wide reporting system to track mental health supports and services to ensure that students in need receive support in a timely manner.

4. School-based Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Screening for all Grades

WHEREAS: Culturally appropriate social-emotional screening should be utilized in schools and done throughout a students' educational journey; and

WHEREAS: Recommendations highlighted above have been researched, tested, and proven to improve students' mental health. These recommendations are inter-connected, and so acting on one without acting on the other will be detrimental in the quest to improve student mental health in Ontario.

WHEREAS: Implementation of these recommendations must be done in consultation with students, teachers, education unions, children's mental health stakeholders, and other relevant partners and; and

WHEREAS: It is acknowledged that the government recently took steps to commit to mandatory mental health training for educators and we thank them for listening to students' voices. It is essential that sufficient resources and funding be provided to school boards to ensure all staff recognize when a student needs mental health support and respond appropriately in urgent situations; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT: That OCSTA endorse and advocate to the Minister of Education to continue to build upon what has been done, and go further by supporting students mental health in Ontario by implementing the above.