

“Developing child and student well-being means supporting the whole child – not only the child’s academic achievement but also his or her cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being.”

- [Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario](#)

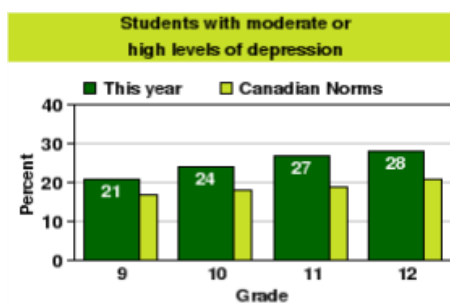
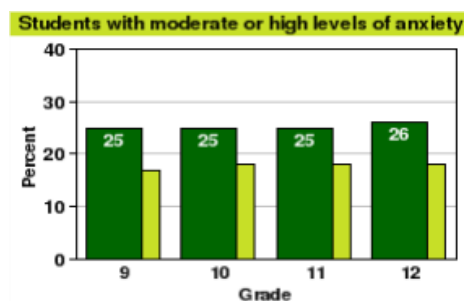
Why Well-Being, Mindfulness and Social-Emotional Learning?

In April, 2016, the Ministry of Education added “Student Well-Being” as a fourth renewed pillar of education: “*The well-being of students needs to move to the centre of the education system’s priorities.*”¹ Policy-makers, staff, parents and students alike recognize that wellness (whether physical, mental, social, emotional) is not an add-on to achievement, but directly supports learning, just as lack of wellness inhibits learning. Students will only reach their full potential in school and life if they feel safe, supported and well.

In Halton’s **Tell Them From Me Student Survey (2015-16)**, 25% of high school students across the district reported moderate to high anxiety (Canadian norm 18%). 25% of students also reported moderate to high depression (Canadian norm 19%). These results have made mental health a focus district-wide.

A [growing body of research](#) supports mindfulness and social-emotional learning programs as beneficial for student wellness (particularly mental health) and also supporting achievement through cognitive function, self-regulation, attention, self-awareness, empathy and more.

Mindfulness supports and complements other social-emotional/relationship vehicles like restorative practices (e.g., classroom circles), collaborative problem-solving, DBT, etc. Mindfulness is not another “program” it is a state of being. See [here](#) for more on why mindfulness is needed in education.



What is Mindfulness? How Does it Develop?

Mindfulness is a non-judgemental, accepting awareness of experiencing the present moment. A state of being that supports living and being well in general, but also learning and working. Mindfulness usually begins as a *practice* (e.g., formal or informal aspects of mindfulness practice), and then people experience it in their normal lives as a temporary *state*, which ultimately (with continued exploration) becomes more or less a consistent *trait* of being.

What Happened? Mindfulness Initiatives in Halton

- **Staff Mindfulness Wellness Sessions:** these volunteer, staff-facilitated, face-to-face sessions are continuing after-hours in the north, east and west for the third year involving 6 facilitators, 3 concurrent sessions and over 200 staff participants supported by a G+ community “[Mindful Learners](#)”
- **Staff Learning:** A shared understanding was created in an intentional and purposeful way through use of the [mindfulschools.org](#) online courses in mindfulness.
 - Forty (40) staff have taken the Mindfulness fundamentals course for educators (including those involved in the initiatives above).
 - Four staff have taken the Mindful Educator Essentials (curriculum) course.
 - Funding supported through HR, Mental Health, School Programs and Special Education combined with a significant discount (e.g., part 1 course \$62.50 instead of \$125 and part 2 course reduced to \$150 from \$550).
- **HSPA Administrator Mindfulness Inquiry** Ten administrators have completed the [mindfulschools.org](#) educator fundamentals course leading to a school-based collaborative inquiry which will continue into 2016-17.
- **Mental Health Strategy Work Plan:** Embed mindfulness into the work plan for 2016-17 as part of tier 1 mental health *promotion* of well-being in a proactive way, in addition to intervention strategies.
- **Secondary School Student Mindfulness (Collaborative Inquiries):** Supported by School Programs from February

¹ Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario. (2014). Retrieved December 8, 2015, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedVision.pdf>

- May, 2016 (involving six high schools, 16 classes/teachers) and continuing in multiple schools for 2016-17. Inquiries explore the impact of mindfulness practices on student learning, attention and wellness.

- **Informal Classroom Wellness Through Mindfulness:** A variety of schools and classrooms are developing and sharing mindfulness practices with students and staff (e.g., Alton Village, Clarksdale, Charles R. Beaudoin, Acton, Hayden, White Oaks, T. A. Blakelock). These schools are using a variety of programs and/or practices spontaneously. Some are connected or supported through initiatives above, some are not.
- **Social-Emotional Learning:** continued monitoring and review of social-emotional learning and mindfulness programs (e.g., mindfulschools.org, Well Aware, MindUp, Positive Action, etc.) for effectiveness, cost, scalability, etc. Potentially use the Decision-Making Tool for Evidence-Informed Programs (SMHA) and/or <http://www.casel.org/guide/>.
- **Continued Capacity Building:** Continue to develop capacity in PSSP staff, School Programs in the area of mindfulness and well-being, not only in the direct aspect of embodying mindfulness but in the skills required to share and build capacity and professional learning in others.
- **“Being. Well.”** see below for details ...

Being. Well.

“Our educators need to build the knowledge and skills associated with positive well-being. ... based on the principle that our education system needs to help students build the knowledge and skills associated with positive well-being so that they can become healthy, active and engaged citizens.” - *Ontario’s Well-Being Strategy*

“Being. Well.” is a Halton-developed learning experience for staff to explore, develop, embody and promote well-being, not only for themselves but for colleagues in the workplace and students in classrooms.

Characteristics

Halton-developed, online learning experience for face-to-face, online or blended learning around well-being with an approximate 8 week format using a Google Classroom environment. Participants will:

- **learn:** research-proven practices and existing Halton initiatives (e.g.,, mentally healthy environment, equity & inclusive education, mindfulness, classroom relationships, restorative practices, self-care, social-emotional learning, etc.);
- **do:** incorporate well-being in school/classrooms, work and life;
- **collaborate:** share ideas, strategies and questions with colleagues and facilitators;
- **reflect:** on implementation and next steps, as well as reflect on *being*;
- **Be:** accept what is happening with equanimity.



Benefits

- Foster learning environments that contribute to student well-being.
- Enhance system capacity for staff learning around well-being and promoting wellness with students.
- Integrates and supports existing district and provincial well-being strategies: equity & inclusive education, safe schools, mental health, healthy schools, etc.
- Zero implementation cost (online, iterative, replicable, scalable) for ongoing system learning.
- Supports a variety of learning applications e.g., school-wide learning focus, collaborative inquiry, staff wellness, mental health sessions, self-paced, etc.
- Experience can continually evolve and transform over time.

Status

- Pilot launch for internal employee review began October 3, 2016 and is now ongoing.

We are grateful for all the support and input we have felt in this work. :-)