

What We Heard:

Well-Being in Our Schools, Strength in Our Society



Executive Summary

September 2017

Promoting well-being, achieving excellence, ensuring equity, and enhancing public confidence are the goals of our renewed vision for education in Ontario.

In November 2016, the Ministry of Education launched a province-wide process of engagement to develop a shared vision for student well-being in Ontario's publicly funded schools. The goal of the engagement process was to cast a wide net to collect broad feedback about student well-being from educators, parents,¹ students, community partners, and interested stakeholders with a strong effort to hear voices that are sometimes not heard.

We wanted to learn about their understanding of student well-being, the conditions that promote and support it, and how we would know we were making progress in this area.

This report describes what we learned from more than 4,500 parents, educators, students, partners and community members across the province.

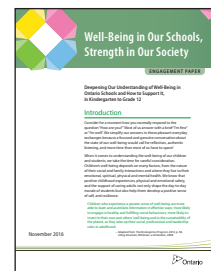
We heard clearly that the development of the whole person – their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, and the development of their sense of self/spirit – is central to every student's day-to-day experience at school, inside and outside the classroom, including the time they spend online. Respondents told us that achievement, equity and well-being are closely interwoven in this development of the whole learner. We also heard of the need to support the well-being of the people working with our students every day as interconnected and distinct from student well-being.

1. The word *parents* is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

Reaching out: How we listened

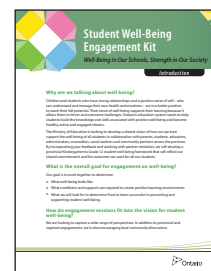
The discussions were guided by an engagement paper (*Well-Being in Our Schools, Strength in Our Society*), released November 2016, which identified questions related to three themes:

- **Understanding Well-Being:** What it means, and the factors that contribute to it.
- **Promoting and Supporting Student Well-Being:** The conditions that promote well-being and support the healthy development of all students in our schools.
- **Knowing Our Impact:** What we will look for to determine if we've been successful in promoting and supporting student well-being.



The process of collecting feedback began with a two-day provincial event. Over the next several months, Ontarians told us what they thought about well-being through:

- nine regional engagement sessions in English and French, as well as various satellite locations
- an online engagement portal that used a survey to collect feedback from educators, parents, students and community organizations
- engagement kits for partners and community organizations
- targeted engagement sessions with community organizations, and
- ongoing discussions with Indigenous partners and communities.



What you told us: Participant voices

Understanding well-being

First and foremost, Ontarians told us that well-being is grounded in a positive **sense of self and spirit**. It is reflected in the students' sense of personal identity and self-worth, and an optimistic and hopeful view of life. Students told us that being **connected, having a sense of belonging** at school, and feeling like a respected and valued member of the school community are critical.



We heard that students must feel **safe, physically and emotionally**, in an inclusive, accepting environment. In the school community, students must be able to engage in **meaningful learning**, and have positive **relationships** with peers and caring adults. We heard that students need opportunities to develop **healthy minds and bodies**, as well as to develop the skills they need to face challenges. They must be equipped to make healthy choices, be actively involved in school life, and have their voices heard.



Promoting and supporting well-being

Participants told us of many outstanding practices in place across Ontario. We heard clearly about the need to look at well-being together with a student's whole experience at school – not in isolation. Participants challenged us to look at the student experience as a whole and consider what we need to do to help all students succeed in the broadest sense of the word.

In the regional sessions, using Design Thinking methodology, participants shared experiences and insights, and used their ideas to create over 140 “prototypes” for innovative ways to promote and support the well-being of students. These prototypes were grouped into five general categories based on common features:

- Teaching, learning and assessment practices
- Supportive spaces
- Skill-building for well-being
- Peer mentors and caring adults
- Targeted programming



Across all of the input, participants described three key areas that are important for promoting and supporting well-being:

1. Access to social and health services
2. Supportive relationships and a sense of belonging
3. An education system that prioritizes student well-being, with a focus on mental health

Knowing our progress

Participants told us that we should consider a variety of data to understand our progress in supporting student well-being. They saw value in both qualitative and quantitative data.

Participants identified key areas we should monitor when looking for progress such as:

- availability of and access to resources and supports
- school-based initiatives, policies and programs
- mental and physical health statistics
- academic achievement levels
- level of participation in extracurricular and volunteer programs
- referrals of students for cognitive, social, emotional or physical concerns.

They also provided examples of how information could be collected, such as:

- student self-reporting tools about engagement in class and school, sense of belonging and feelings of safety and security
- reporting from parents and families on their child's experience at school
- reporting from educators on the school and classroom environment.

Conclusion: You told us – We're listening

With its far-reaching approach, this engagement process provided us with significant information to help us understand, encourage and support student well-being in Ontario.

We heard clearly that the development of the whole person – their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, and the development of their sense of self/spirit – is central to every student's school experience, inside and outside the classroom, including the time they spend online.

You told us strongly that achievement, equity and well-being must be closely interwoven in this development of the whole learner through day-to-day interactions.

We heard that well-being is grounded in a **positive sense of self and spirit**. It is reflected in the student's sense of personal identity and self-worth, and in an optimistic and hopeful view of life.

- Students told us that being connected, having a sense of belonging at school, and feeling like a respected and valued member of the school community are critical.



We heard that students must feel **safe, physically and emotionally**, in an inclusive, accepting environment.

- In the school community, students must be able to engage in meaningful learning, and have positive relationships with peers and caring adults.



We heard that students need opportunities to develop **healthy minds and bodies**, as well as to obtain the skills they need to face challenges.

- They must be equipped to make healthy choices, be actively involved in school life, and have their voices heard.



You told us. We're listening.

Ontario's future depends on today's students, the next generation of citizens and leaders. All students need to be supported to learn about themselves, collaborate with others, and develop the skills they need to contribute in their communities and thrive in the world. We also recognize the need to support staff well-being. We are working with our education partners to learn how we can best support the well-being of staff in our schools. By supporting our students now, we will ensure a bright future for them, and for all Ontarians.

More information

If you would like more information on Ontario's work to promote and support student well-being, visit ontario.ca/studentwellbeing.