I am writing to provide clarification regarding a number of activities, either active or in planning, related to the building of collaborative relationships between district school boards and local agencies in support of student mental health. Presently, a number of district school boards already have protocols in place for these relationships.

**Collaboration Protocols**
On May 14, 2008 a Provincial Discussion Table Agreement was reached between support staff unions and all district school boards to develop provincially, a Protocol Template and/or Guiding Principles for partnerships with external agencies in the areas of regulated health professionals, social service professionals and paraprofessionals, as essential for the delivery of services and/or programs to students with special needs and/or at risk. Talks are underway with the respective provincial unions and/or associations to develop this template/guiding principles with the intent of having a draft in place for vetting with district school boards and potential partnership this spring.

Any articulated relationships involving regulated health professionals, social service professionals and paraprofessionals within communities established through the mental health initiative listed below, or any other collaborative initiatives, will need to meet the requirements of the Protocol Template/Guiding Principles.

**Student Mental Health**
As you may be aware, the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch has recently taken on the lead in the Ministry of Education in regards to student mental health. This memo is also intended to provide clarity on the number of initiatives, across government that are currently underway to support student mental health.
Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions
As you are aware, mental health and addictions is a government priority. An all-party committee has been formed by the Ontario legislature to help develop ways to improve access to mental health and addiction services in the province.

The Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions – with representatives from all three parties – will work with consumers/survivors, providers, experts and other interested parties to determine the mental health and addiction needs that currently exist. The committee is expected to issue a report in 2010 that will:

- Determine the mental health and addiction needs of children and young adults; First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; and seniors
- Explore innovative approaches to delivering services in the community
- Identify ways to leverage existing opportunities and initiatives within the current mental health and addictions system.

Additional information on the Select Committee, including membership can be found at: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/mentalhealth/minister_advisgroup/selectcom.html

Minister’s Advisory Group on Mental Health and Addictions
The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) has created the Minister's Advisory Group on Mental Health and Addictions made up of consumers, family members, providers and researchers from across the province. It includes a range of perspectives such as children and youth, Aboriginal peoples, seniors, women and adults in the workplace. Input from this group, and the Select Committee will be used to develop a long-term strategy for mental health and addiction for the province.

Five working groups have been established to support the Advisory Group, three of which have school board representation: Healthy Communities, System Design and Early Identification and Intervention.

MOHLTC recognizes that people with varied backgrounds, life experiences and expertise can make an important contribution and has planned many different ways to engage stakeholders. For additional information on the Advisory Group and its work and for information about how to get involved, please see the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s website at: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/mentalhealth/minister_advisgroup/minister_advisgroup.html

Framework for Collaborative Mental Health Services
SEPPB has recently contracted with Michael Klejman to develop a framework for collaborative local strategies which will support school boards in their on-going efforts to address the challenges they and their communities face in supporting students with mental health difficulties. Michael, working with Bob Morton, has interviewed/surveyed 10 school boards to identify best practices in selected school boards. This information will be used to develop a framework for collaborative local efforts to support student mental health. The final report is expected in May 2009. Once the Branch has had the opportunity to analyze the results, in context of the other initiatives in this memo, the findings will be shared with school boards.
Research on School-based Mental Health
You may have also heard that the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario has funded Dr. Bruce Ferguson of the Hospital for Sick Children to conduct a literature review of school-based mental health and to complete a scan of selected school board practices to identify best practices and collaborative delivery of services for students with mental health needs. This report is also expected around the end of May 2009.

Mapping of Mental Health Services
SEPPB is also working closely with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) on the implementation of A Shared Responsibility: Ontario's Policy Framework for Child and Youth Mental Health (the Framework). Released in November 2006, the Framework sets the direction for change in the provision of mental health services to children and youth in the province.

MCYS is leading interministerial implementation of the Framework, beginning with a mapping exercise of provincially-funded child and youth mental health programs and services to better understand current service provision. This exercise includes data collection related to MCYS funded community agencies as well as the mental health services funded by the Ministry of Education (EDU) and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) for the 2007/08 fiscal and school year.

In Phase 1 (Spring 2008), school boards completed a survey that provided system level information about programs for students with mental health needs. A proposal for Phase 2 is under consideration in order to clarify information obtained in Phase 1 and gain a more in depth understanding of the types and funding of mental health programs that are available at the school level, in particular those targeted to students with greater levels of need.

The information collected from the provincial mapping exercise is being used to develop maps and other descriptive products that are helping establish a common understanding across sectors and agencies of the current state of child and youth mental health service provision in Ontario.

Student Support Leadership Initiative
As you know, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is providing multi-year funding of $3M per year for three years beginning in 2007/08 for the Student Support Leadership initiative to help school boards enhance partnerships with local community agencies meeting the mental health needs of children and youth.

Such partnerships are enabling school boards/authorities and community agencies to:
- Share expertise;
- Improve decision-making through collaborative planning mechanisms;
- Establish and/or enhance referral mechanisms;
- Increase access to services and supports for students and families;
- Improve a student’s and family’s ability to understand, navigate and use the services and supports available to them; and
- Maximize local resources.

The funding is being provided annually to 29 geographic clusters of neighbouring school boards and coordinating community agencies to work together to provide collective leadership and development of local partnerships to meet the needs of students.
Recently, three Cluster Consultants were retained through the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (Centre of Excellence). From February 2009 to March 2010, the Cluster Consultants are working directly with a sample of Clusters from across the Partnership Continuum. Cluster Consultants will also interact regularly with all Clusters to investigate best practices, enhance effective and sustainable leadership practices and partnerships within and across sectors and to support enhanced communication across sectors.

One can see that not only the Ministry of Education but also MCYS and MOHLTC are responding to the concerns expressed by district school boards across the province about the growing mental health needs of their students.

I trust that this information provides increased clarity regarding a number of the larger initiatives underway in support of building collaboration and in supporting students with mental health needs.

Should you have any further questions please contact your regional special education leads in the Field Services Branch.

*Original signed by*

Barry Finlay