

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Building Connections with Mental Health Literacy Beachy Cove Elementary School (Portugal Cove-St. Philips, NL)

Background

Beachy Cove Elementary is a primary school in the rural community of Portugal Cove-St. Philips, located roughly 20 km outside St. Johns, Newfoundland with a school population of 540 students in Kindergarten to grade four. The school reopened in September after being shut down for six months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students and staff have been adjusting to new routines, including physical distancing with class cohorts, staggered recesses, and minimal contact between students. Programs that have been implemented in the past to increase students' understanding of teamwork, community and connection, have been halted due to the pandemic.

Promising Practice

The Building Connections with Mental Health Literacy initiative is a multi-stage project designed to impact all students at Beachy Cove. The ultimate goal of this project is to foster creative collaboration between grade three and four students. The product that emerges from this collaboration will be a non-fiction primary-level literacy publication about the nature of resiliency, its barriers, and strategies for achieving resiliency. Participating students will learn about mental health, elaborate on their own strategies used for building resiliency, collaborate with peers in to achieve a common goal, and experience the pride of ownership and contribution when the product is published.

To help students learn more about mental well-being, funds will be invested to purchase children's literature on the topic of mental health. These resources will be available to all students and will be used to inspire learning, create safe and open discussions, and define resiliency in child-friendly ways. This literature will be used as a springboard for the creation of the grade three and four students' resilience publication.

Students of Beachy Cove will collaborate on the planning, writing, editing, illustrating and publishing aspects of this resource. Grade three students will work in groups, with each group developing one page of the publication. Each page will focus on a strategy that is used to overcome mental health issues and develop resiliency. A draft copy of the page will then be shared with a partner group of grade fours for editing. When writing is complete, the grade threes will sketch concept illustrations that provide a visual to their written text. Over a virtual meeting, partner groups will agree on the final copies of text and illustrations. Once group projects are completed, the pages will be assembled and





bound, shared with the school and school community in a PDF version, and recorded as child-narrated read-aloud version for wide distribution on YouTube.

Impact

By exploring resiliency and how one can approach stressful situations, students will be encouraged to verbalize their feelings while exploring strategies that they can use to overcome their challenges. The resource created by the students will allow teachers and families to better understand what students are feeling

This project immerses students in multiple aspects of social-emotional learning at both metacognitive and practical levels. For direct participants, this initiative incorporates core learning outcomes of [Michael Fullan's Deep Learning](#) (character education, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking) while embedded in activities that support the language arts, health, and STEAM curricula.

Sustainability

Once the children's literature on mental health topics is purchased, this project can easily be repeated in future years. It will also be meaningful to have students complete the project again in grade four but now taking on more of a leadership role.

The project template is easily transferable to other schools and suits a variety of learners. There are multiple responsibilities needed to move the project forward and therefore, students with differing interests, talents and learning styles can be showcased. Students can be involved in writing, editing, role playing (acting out strategies), making and creating (props & backdrops), using technology (green screen, 3D printer, videography, stop motion production). Every participant will have a chance to contribute and to shine.

Modifications

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- Instead of a book, students can collaborate on writing a song, creating and performing a play/skit, or other forms of art
- Older students can be paired with students at another school and meet virtually to create an online resource (e.g., web page, infographic, etc.)
- Plan a Wellness Month where in-class activities explore mental health in a cross-curricular way

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