

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Cochrane Healing Arts Time (CHAT) Program

Rocky View School Division (Cochrane, AB)

Background

The school board in this region inspires a love of learning and community by engaging all learners through meaningful and challenging experiences, preparing them to understand, adapt and successfully contribute to the changing global community. The goal is to offer stimulating, flexible programming that makes learning relevant and exciting to today's learners. The CHAT program was implemented at a neighboring middle school and high school in the school board.

Promising Practice

The CHAT program is unique in that it allows students to creatively explore their feelings through art. There are many benefits of using healing arts to facilitate learning. It empowers students to develop self-esteem, confidence, advocacy, resiliency, efficacy, peer relationships, and 21st century competencies. Students can improve their coping skills which enables them to deal with peer pressure and academic stressors more effectively.



The program is run by a Child Development Associate (CDA) with additional support from administration and teachers. It operates on both a registered enrollment and a drop-in basis and is based upon a referral system from teachers, administration, and learning support. The program is held in a room that provides a calm and safe space for all students to explore and uncover any personal challenges. Students complete healing art projects throughout the year that encourage self-reflection, expression, independence, and empowerment. Over time,

students develop strong feelings of belonging to the program and to the wider school community. Students develop connections to the facilitators, other students, as well as a new level of school engagement. They utilize the CHAT room space as a means of regulating feelings and emotions in a supportive environment promoting self-care.

Impact

Since the implementation of the CHAT program, there is a decreased stigma of mental health within the school. Students are more open to sharing with the CDA and with each other. Statistical results demonstrate that students that utilize the CHAT room have improved attendance, and in many instances, improved academic performance as well. CHAT has improved and eased the stressful transition to high school for Grade 8 CHAT students. It has also enhanced the communication between the CDAs on the middle school and the high school guidance teams who work as a whole to improve student success.

Sustainability

The CHAT room has become a part of the school's culture and has been easily sustained. The budget to maintain the supplies in the CHAT room is small and can be managed by the schools and any materials needed to update the CHAT room over time are also affordable for the schools.

Modifications

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

- Host CHAT room sessions in an outdoor classroom and allow students to connect with nature while developing mental health strategies.
- Encourage older students to support younger students and develop a peer support approach.
- If you don't have a room in your school to dedicate to a CHAT room, then create your own CHAT space in a section of your classroom.

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