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Featured Mental Health Initiative

Outdoor Wellness

Mount Stewart Consolidated School (Mount Stewart, PEI)

Background

Mount Stewart Consolidated is a K-8 school with 189 students located in the historic village of Mount Stewart, PEI. Based on the 2016 census, the village has a median household income of $24,942.00. It is an English speaking school, with 5% of children speaking the Eastern Algonquian language of Mi'kmaq at home. There is a high number of students with special needs in the school with 58% of students requiring Educational Assistants, Resource, Youth Workers and other forms of assistance. Over 25% of families are unable to pay for school supplies and extracurricular activities for their children.

Promising Practice

The proposed initiative is to provide students with more opportunities to improve the quality of their outdoor experiences at school. Currently, students, especially those in older grades, do not have enough options for being physically active outdoors. Many students at the school do not get the required amount of physical activity based on Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines. As they get older, more students spend less time outdoors when not

at school. In fact, many report not leaving their houses the entire weekend, partaking in too much screen time. Students are experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and anger, and the program team believes that giving students more opportunities and choices to be physically active outside will help improve their mental well-being.

In preparation for the Outdoor Wellness program, the school has started collecting student feedback about the types of activities to include in the program. To support program implementation, a variety of structures for physical activity participation outdoors will be built. These structures include an outdoor classroom (honouring students with Indigenous heritage by being built beside the school's Wigwam), a ga-ga ball pit, a rope/obstacle course, and a geocaching course The school will partner with community members to support with the construction. Students will also support with the construction being mentored by the community members. Throughout the planning, design, and implementation of the program, students will be involved and

will learn a variety of new leadership and life skills. Student feedback will be collected throughout the program to support future program enhancements.

Impact

The school hopes to see an increase in participation in the rates of both structured and unstructured physical activity. The goal is for all students to spend time each day being active outside and enjoying nature. Activity rates will be measured formatively through observation and check-ins by the program organizing team. The team predicts that they will observe fewer behavioural issues resulting in the removal of students from class. The program team hopes that the initiative supports them in learning more about their students and their interests outside of the classroom. Through risk and play, the team hopes to see students interacting outside of their comfort zones and growing with their peers while incorporating movement into daily learning.

Sustainability

Once the structures are built, these outdoor activities can be utilized year-round with minimal maintenance. The structures are sustainable and can be used by anyone in the community outside of school hours. The school will also look for community partners and volunteers to support with funding and building the structures.

Modifications

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

- Create a school-wide physical activity challenge that encourages students to be active at recess and other recreational times
- Introduce non-traditional physical activities to the students to engage those who do not regularly participate in sport
- Incorporate loose parts play in open recreational areas during recess to encourage imaginative, risky-play

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