

## Featured Mental Health Initiative

### Promoting Mental Health through Self-Regulation Archwood School (Winnipeg, MB)

#### Background

Archwood School is located between an industrial park and a rail line yard. This creates an opening for wind, train, and traffic noise. During a year-long partnership with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), school staff examined the state of mental health practices within the school. After gathering data and observations from students and staff, conducting a walk-through of the building, and implementing surveys with all staff members, the WRHA recommended that the school enhance existing student social spaces and in order to promote healthy and safe interactions indoors and outdoors. A staff committee was created to analyze the recommendations from the WRHA and decided that the creation of a community garden and the repurposing of a small hallway would allow for existing indoor and outdoor spaces to become places that would support mental health and self-regulation.

#### Promising Practice

This initiative is focused on creating spaces within the physical and social environment for improving mental health. Natural improvements to the playground and existing outdoor spaces will allow students to play and learn in a nurturing outdoor setting, as opposed to an industrial one.



For the community garden, raised garden boxes were created for each class to plant, tend to, and create learning opportunities about curricular outcomes related to plants, soil, ecosystems, and sustainability. The gardens also provide a space for self-regulation while allowing students to spend time in nature. The school has also created more natural spaces in the school yard for structured learning and unstructured play that will promote positive mental health and wellness for students. Inside, unused hallway has been equipped with bulletin boards decorated with activities that promote self-regulation and kindness. Additionally, seating has been added for an interactive learning space for students to work independently or in groups, serving as an alternative to the classroom space.

#### Impact

The creation of these spaces will benefit all students as they will gain indoor and outdoor spaces that promote mental health and an alternative setting for educational programming. Additionally, these spaces provide safe settings for self-regulation, individual time to reflect, and small group interactions that will create authentic and supportive learning opportunities. The school's student leadership team, in partnership with the staff committee, will continue to work together to enhance and maintain their community garden. The same steps will be taken to implement changes to the hallway space. Student voice and choice will continue to be utilized, and students will be actively involved in implementing the changes to the school in order to create a sense of ownership and to ensure they feel their thoughts and ideas are valued at school.

## Sustainability

During the summer months, the community garden space is sustained by the staff and children at the year-round daycare at the school. The daycare takes care of the watering, weeding, and harvesting of vegetables. For the hallway space, identified staff members are responsible for creating self-regulation and kindness bulletin boards on a rotating schedule to ensure that the space is constantly evolving and adapting to support student mental health needs. Finally, students will be invited to share how these spaces influence their learning and mental health, and they will be invited to contribute their ideas so that the school can continue to foster an environment that nurtures mental health.

### Modifications

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

- If your school has limited funding for renewal of natural outdoor spaces, consider regularly taking students to a local park or greenspace
- Incorporate loose parts play during recess and other parts of the school day
- Collect donations of old kitchen utensils and equipment and create an outdoor play kitchen for younger students

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