

Soft Start Welcomes

F.H. Collins Secondary School (Whitehorse, YT)

Background

F.H. Collins Secondary School is the only immersion high school in the Yukon, with 700 students from grades 8 to 12. It also caters to students in outlying communities that do not have a high school for students to attend. School staff are continuously working towards building a strong, welcoming school community and culture.

Promising Practice

The staff at F.H Collins are working to implement "soft start" mornings for their students who are affected by trauma including, but not limited to, the inter-generational effects of residential schools. They would like to see the opportunity for students to come to school and have the chance to check-in with a certified mental wellness counsellor on a regular basis. Similarly, the staff want students to have the opportunity to connect with other students experiencing similar situations. A soft start morning with a wellness counsellor will create an atmosphere that allows students to adjust to the school environment, prepare a healthy mindset before they begin their school day, and being introduced to a variety of mental health supports and strategies.

The school includes [Gadzoosda Student Residence](#), a residence for students attending the school with hometowns 70 to 800 kilometres away. Students live at the residence during the week because there are no high schools in their hometowns. Being away from home can be hard, and the students at the residence often need the most support.



This initiative will support students in a more holistic manner addressing the emotional and deep-rooted causes of trauma so they have the opportunity to become successful citizens and leaders in their communities.

Impact

As a result of the initiative, school staff hope to see an improvement in the number of behaviour problems, and a reduction in the rates of smoking, vaping, drinking, drugs, and other forms of substance use. They hope that students will be comfortable turning to their community for support as opposed to substance use. School staff also hope to expand the initiative throughout the entire school day, so that students can seek support from a wellness counsellor whenever they need it.

Sustainability

While the initiative is dependent on accessing funding for a mental wellness counsellor, the school will continue to look for funding to support the counsellor moving forward. The other components of the initiative, such as adjusting the start of instructional time and selecting and choosing students for the initiative, are easily sustained by the school staff committed to ensuring the initiative is a success.

Modifications

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

- Provide students with access to mental health resources so that they may utilize them if they are not comfortable sharing in a group setting
- Utilize the help of youth mental health ambassadors at Jack.org and either book a mental health talk for your school or attend a mental health summit
- If access to a wellness counsellor is not possible, encourage a soft start for the school by having homeroom teachers and students participate in activities about mental health strategies or topics

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