

Featured Mental Health Initiative

TAG Program Initiative

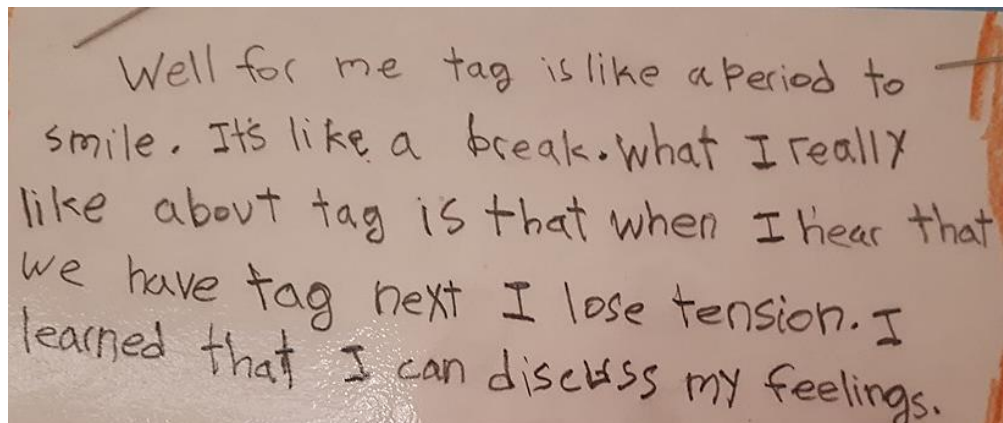
Robert H. Lagerquist Middle School (Brampton, ON)

Background

Robert H. Lagerquist (RHL) is a middle school in Brampton, Ontario for students in grades 6 to 8. The school includes a diverse community from a cultural, socioeconomic, and academic perspective. There are approximately 200 English as a Second Language (ESL) students and 200 students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Many students have endured difficult situations in their lives and therefore, many deal with stress on a regular basis.

Promising Practice

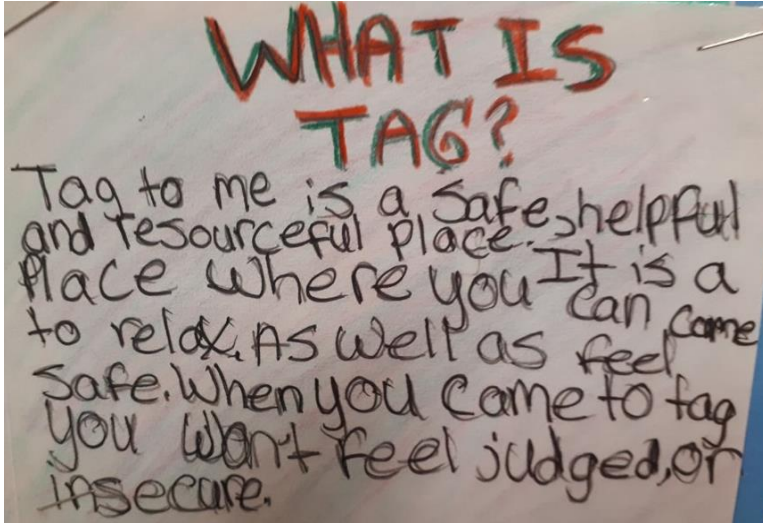
Two years ago, RHL implemented a new program in the school called TAG (Teacher Advisory and Guidance). The TAG program is a means to deliver mental health lessons. TAG is structured in a way that students receive two



periods a week on to work on focused mental health topics that they otherwise could not dedicate enough time. TAG first began, as teachers noticed that many students struggled with communication or conflict resolution, and they believed that students needed greater guidance in these areas.

Every week, students get the opportunity to meditate, write in journals, and have a class community circle. During these circles, many topics are discussed. Students will often write problems or questions anonymously on a piece of paper and the entire class will respond to the note. By doing so, students discover that they have more in common with each other than they thought. Students develop greater empathy and understanding of each other which leads to better relationships.

Many students have expressed that they are dealing with significant stress, so teachers want to expand the initiative and create a calming kit to support students further with strategies and ideas. Examples of objects for the calming kit include hand-made stress balls, painted rocks, and lavender bags. Depending on the students' needs, additional items could be added such as headphones,.



Impact

School staff have surveyed students asking for feedback about how they are dealing with stress on a 10-point scale, and if they are utilizing any lessons taught in TAG. Moving forward, teachers will continue to monitor these levels, and with the addition of the calming kits, the hope is to see improvement of stress levels in each student.

Results of TAG have illustrated that students who struggle with stress and mental health issues show interest in confiding in one another in a safe, monitored environment,

such as their community circles. Students love listening and sharing and have made it clear that TAG is an incredibly useful program that they appreciate having at school.

Sustainability

As more teachers are trained and given access to TAG materials, and more students are exposed to stress management techniques, the more the TAG program will become a part of the school culture. The TAG program is low-cost and easily accessible for all teachers and students. The program examines the unique set of needs for each student and provides mental health support by discovering which strategies and tools work best for each individual student.

Modifications

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

- Incorporate physical activity while sharing stories/experiences and organize students in small groups or pairs and go for a "walk and talk"
- Provide teachers with additional mental health tools, resources, and training that will assist the quality of guidance that they can provide
- For younger grades, host literacy groups that examine and discuss different stories about mental health including *The Princess and the Fog* by Loyd Jones or *Visiting Feelings* by Lauren Rubenstein

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