

MAPC Resolution
Approved 2015
Mental Health Supports for Students in Manitoba Schools 2015

- Respectfully submitted by Manitoba Association of Parent Councils Board of Directors for consideration at the 2015 Annual General Meeting.

Background

Parents and schools have a shared responsibility to foster an environment which considers the health, safety, and wellbeing of all students in a school community. Ongoing discussions regarding mental health are well documented priorities for education stakeholders throughout the province, as demonstrated in the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) Journal http://www.mass.mb.ca/documents/mass_journal_spring2013.pdf and at the MASS Education for ACTion conference in November 2014. While Manitoba schools often demonstrate exemplary work and strong programming in support of students experiencing mental health concerns, there is still much work that needs to be done.

Introduction

It is widely understood that, “Without timely treatment and supports, children and youth living with mental illness do not flourish.” (Mental Health Framework for Students: A Position Statement, 2013, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents) Youth may miss or drop out of school, engage in high risk behavior, or contemplate suicide as a result of their unaddressed or misunderstood mental health concerns. Parents and families are left feeling isolated and overwhelmed in finding help for their child, and often look to the school for support or resources to assist them in managing the ongoing challenges they may be facing. Situations such as these become even more complicated when the child’s parent is dealing with personal mental health concerns as well.

While it is understood that parents have a responsibility to work collaboratively with the school and keep informed of the development or existence of medical conditions, including mental health concerns, resources and supports are often lacking - especially in some communities. Waitlists for diagnosis or treatment can be long, staff resources are limited, and communication challenges between the various sectors involved in youth well-being can add strain an already overworked system. As a result students, families, and schools are often left feeling frustrated, upset, and anxious. While it may be true that all of the parties involved *want* to help, families are often left feeling helpless – or even worse – hopeless.

MAPC believes that timely access to appropriate professional resources to address mental health concerns of youth is a high priority in Manitoba.

MAPC supports early assessment and diagnosis of mental health concerns for all grade levels in Manitoba schools. MAPC supports the implementation of proactive strategies to address mental health challenges which focus on prevention and intervention. MAPC supports education for all stakeholders to develop a greater understanding and awareness of mental health concerns in children and youth. MAPC supports timely access to mental health resources and supports for all school communities in Manitoba.

Action Request

It is with these understandings in mind, that MAPC is voicing its support of the recommendations made by MASS in the “development and implementation of a Comprehensive Collaborative Mental Health Framework for Manitoba.” This framework includes:

1. *Provincial Plan*: A strategic, provincial plan for a comprehensive, collaborative 3-tiered mental health framework for all children and youth (ages 0 to 18) developed and implemented by all Ministries of Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet.
2. *Timely and Universal Access to Mental Health Professionals*: Timely, responsive access to the services of mental health professionals for all Manitoba’s children and youth.
3. *Psychiatric Services*: Enhanced psychiatric services for all Manitoba’s children and youth requiring Tier 3 Intensive interventions and supports.
4. *Collaborative Community-Based Planning*: On-going school-based collaboration with mental health professionals to plan and deliver Universal, Selective, and Intensive Tiers of programming, supports and services for children and youth.
5. *Communication Protocol*: A communication protocol, including common language, to improve the communication between mental health professionals and all intersectoral partners.
6. *Equitable Services for all Manitoba School Division*: Equitable mental health services for the rural, northern and urban regions of the province.

(Mental Health Framework for Students, 2013)

MAPC strongly urges the Government of Manitoba and all education stakeholders to continue working together to address the mental health needs of Manitoba children and youth to the age of 21.

References:

Manitoba Association of School Superintendents. (Spring 2013). Mental Health Framework for Students: A Position Statement. Retrieved from http://www.mass.mb.ca/documents/mental_health_framework.pdf