



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

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MLHU SCHOOL TEAM'S RETURN TO SCHOOL HEALTH WORK

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 31-22, re: "MLHU School Team's Return to School Health Work" for information.

Key Points

- As school communities return to a new "normal", MLHU school public health nurses have returned to working in schools.
- MLHU school nurses reported being welcomed by school administrators, support staff, educators and students.
- Mental health is the top concern in schools, followed by sexual health/healthy relationships, vaping cessation, and eating disorders. Overall, school staff report that students are lacking a general sense of wellbeing as a result of the pandemic.

Background

Schools are the most immediate settings for promoting lifelong health of children and youth (Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, 2018; Seigart, Dietsch, & Parent, 2013). At school, children and youth develop social competencies, such as self-confidence, friendship, empathy, participation, respect, and responsibility, as well as foster healthy habits such as physical activity, proper nutrition, and good personal hygiene (Colao, Piscitelli, Pulimeno et al., 2020; Lancet Editorial, 2022; Zajacova, & Lawrence, 2018).

The overall goal of the School Health Team (SHT), which is comprised of the Child Health and Young Adult Teams, is to achieve the optimal health of school-aged children and youth using a Comprehensive School Health approach. This is an internationally recognized approach that supports improvement in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated, and holistic way. This whole-school model builds capacity to incorporate wellbeing as an essential aspect of student achievement. This is done through partnership and collaboration with school boards and schools (OPH School Standard, 2018). To achieve this overall goal, the SHT supports approximately 33 secondary schools and 150 elementary schools in the Middlesex-London region by providing resources, programs and services. The allocation of resources, programs, and services within the SHT is informed by proportionate universalism, whereby the team strives to achieve a blend of universal and targeted interventions to reduce inequities within school communities (Health Equity Guideline, 2018).

The onset of COVID-19 in February 2020 suspended all health promotion work in schools; however, COVID-19 resulted in school boards and public health units working alongside each other in a new way to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, public health and school boards report that their working relationship is stronger than ever due to the pandemic. As school communities return to a new "normal", MLHU school public health nurses have returned to working in and with schools. They have been welcomed

by school administrators, support staff, educators and students. School staff have conveyed that “a big piece was missing from the school not having the public health nurse at the school.” MLHU staff have been met with many requests and invitations to collaborate on healthy school initiatives and to partner with Guidance Counselors, and Student Success Teachers. The general sentiment is that school staff are thankful to have public health nurses back in schools as a caring adult and essential support for students and the broader school community.

Next Steps

School administrators and staff reported their main concerns to their MLHU school public health nurses. Through these conversations, it was determined that mental health is the top concern in schools, followed by sexual health/healthy relationships, vaping cessation and eating disorders. Overall, school staff report that students are lacking a general sense of wellbeing as a result of the pandemic. The work of the school team is grounded in population health, and the role of staff is focused on health promotion and illness prevention. The school team is pleased to inform the Board of Health that after two years of focusing on COVID-19 prevention and management, the team has returned to school health work and are working alongside school partners.

This report was prepared by the Child Health and Young Adult Team, Healthy Living Division.



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