



TRUSTEE James Li MBA CPA CMA

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January 14, 2021

Dear Ward Council Members

Thank you for attending our ward forum on Student Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic, presented by Shameen Sandhu, System Leader of Mental Health and Professional Support Services. I am grateful for all those who have worked so diligently to attend to the mental health and wellbeing needs of our students during such an unprecedented time. On behalf of Ward 13, I would like to thank Shameen for her informative presentation, as it allowed parents and staff to better understand how to build on not only our children's resiliency, but also our own.

Please see a below for the minutes from our meeting.

Meeting Date/Time: January 14, 2021 7:00 PM

Meeting Location: Zoom Online Meeting hosted by Trustee James Li

Number of Attendees: 127 participants including 20 school administrators

Non-School Councils Members in Attendance: James Li (Trustee), Shameen Sandhu (System Leader of Mental Health and Professional Support Services, Aretha Phillip (Ward 13 PIAC Representative), Courtney Lewis (Learning Network 9 Superintendent), Kiki Zhang (Trustee's Office Shared Services Liaison), Tania Jabbar (Trustee's Office Shared Services Liaison)

Items Discussed:

- a. What is mental health and mental wellness?
- b. Coping during COVID-19 for parents, children, and youth in lockdown & higher screen times
- c. Strategies for you and your children to support positive mental wellbeing during the challenging times of COVID-19

Summary of concerns from parents

- How can I motivate my child to participate in online learning?
- There is a demand for more culturally diverse therapists/counsellors available
- Parents must speak to their child's teacher and communicate what they enjoy to re-engage them
- Students displaying more mental health challenges must be referred to their family doctor

- Alternatively, parents can go to school admin and tell them about the issues their child is going through and they may be referred to a social worker
- Parents can collaborate with school counsellors, and teachers to limit screen time and make boundaries
- Teachers need to push students to go outside and move more
- Homework load is becoming difficult for students
- Need for daily wellness check by teachers

Summary of meeting

- Mental health is the overall state of wellbeing which requires a development of coping skills
- Wellbeing is how we respond to the ups and downs of life
- Coping skills allow us to build resilience during flight or flight triggers
- The COVID-19 pandemic has made inequity more apparent
- Issues related to equity have had a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing
- There is no clear understanding of what equity means in the mental health context which makes it difficult to develop a plan of action
- The impact of COVID-19 on mental wellbeing and mental health cannot be minimized regardless of the circumstances one is in
- There are physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and professional contexts one must consider when taking care of themselves and each other
- Encouraging balance, and offering reassurances after listening carefully is an effective strategy for communication with children and teens
- It is important to pay attention to your child's relationships with teachers, family, and their socialization patterns with peers to determine any mental health concerns
- Physical activity and breathing exercises are good strategies for family mental health
- When too much screen time is a concern, offering breaks, compassionate boundaries, brainstorming alternatives, and keeping a schedule is effective
- COVID-19 has developed chronic stress, where there are higher demands for balancing work and home life with concerns for future prospects
- There is a need for different spaces when students and parents are learning or working from home
- Everyone is grieving some kind of loss during the pandemic, but it is affective people differently
- There are socio-emotional gaps in student learning due to the pandemic
- More evidence-based practices required to train staff and students to build resilience
- Students require stimulating activities where grown mindset is normalized
- Boundaries for screen time outside of school or work time can mitigate self-care concerns
- It is important to reframe negative thoughts to develop better coping skills



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Additional Resources

School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO): <https://smho-smsso.ca/>

School Mental Health Action Kit: <https://smho-smsso.ca/covid-19/educators/>

Supporting Mentally Healthy Conversations about Anti-Black Racism for Students: <https://smho-smsso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Conversations-Anti-Black-Racism.pdf>

Please let me know if you have any questions to the meeting minutes as recorded above. I look forward to meeting you in our next Ward Council Meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Li".

James Li

Trustee, Ward 13 Don Valley North