



*We are a Christ-centered Catholic faith community that celebrates diversity and fosters spiritual growth, inspiring all to reach their full potential in mind, body and spirit.*

# **Niagara Catholic District School Board**

## **Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy 2021-2024**



## Message from the Director of Education

***“Every Ontario student deserves to have access to evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention programming. Our model in Ontario is designed to help students flourish and remain resilient as they journey through life.” School Mental Health Ontario***

As we begin the 2021 school year, it is important to acknowledge and recognize that we are entering a school year and school environment unlike any other in history. We begin the school year following a global pandemic and amid the challenges of anti-black and anti-indigenous racism. We recognize that this is a difficult situation and that students and staff have many questions related to COVID-19 and the inequalities in our communities that still exist and the impact this has on themselves, their schools and friends.

What is certain is our Board’s commitment to staff and students in supporting their mental health. That we are in this together. That we will provide resources, and varying levels of support for all staff and students, to help reduce anxiety, and to promote their positive mental health. Together we are stronger.

The Trustees and Senior Leaders of the Niagara Catholic District School Board are committed to making the Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy a priority, with a clear and focused vision for Mental Health. Our Board recognizes that well-being is positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are met. We recognize that mental health exists on a continuum that ranges from mental wellness to psychiatric disorders and that student mental health shapes a student’s academic success and their behaviours in school. These plans will build on current initiatives in the areas of positive mental health, fostering safe and accepting schools, promoting healthy schools and reinforcing the importance of equity and inclusive education.

The Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy provides a blueprint for continuing change; this strategy provides a framework to encourage everyone to strive for positive mental health and wellness within our Board. This three-year plan builds upon the previous Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy with a focus on wellness, resiliency and positive mental health. We will be explicit in highlighting the links between our faith and mental health, and how faith can have a large positive impact on our mental health.

***“With consistent access to high quality, evidence-based mental health information, support and services, Ontario students know how to care for their own mental health, seek help when problems arise, and maintain a strong sense of identity, belonging, confidence and hope even in challenging circumstances” – School Mental Health Ontario***

We know that we cannot implement the Strategy on our own, which is why we are committed to maintaining strong and healthy relationships with School Mental Health Ontario, and our community partners to provide the best level of care for our students.

Together as a Niagara Catholic family, we can, and we will, continue to make a positive difference in the lives of our students and staff.



Camillo Cipriano  
Director of Education

***We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love.  
Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace. - Pope Francis***

## Message from the Chair of the Board

***“Schools are an ideal place for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention.”***

***- School Mental Health Ontario***

Last year, we faced a year more challenging than any other in education. We entered the school year in a global pandemic, with many unknowns for both our staff and our students. We had learning curves and situations to encounter that we had never faced before. We had difficult decisions to make on behalf of our staff, students and families regarding the education of youth. In all of this, we maintained one constant thought-that every decision that was being made, was with our students and families best interest in mind.

As we begin the 2021-2022 school year, it is important to acknowledge that although the pandemic is not over, we begin to see a light. We recognize the importance of having hope and faith, as we continue the journey in Catholic education. As we talk about hope and faith, we see the very clear links that both have to mental health. Niagara Catholic, and the Board of Trustees, are committed and dedicated to making the mental health of our staff and students a priority. Our system is the optimal place to emphasize prevention, promotion and awareness about mental health, and to support those who may need additional support.

The Trustees are committed to making the Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy a priority, with a clear and focused vision for Mental Health. The Strategy provides a 3-year plan with an emphasis on hope and recovery after the pandemic, our clear links between faith and mental health, and the embedding of social-emotional learning into our everyday activities. Our goal is to support the students in need, and to educate all of our students about the importance of help-seeking when necessary. By embedding social-emotional learning into our everyday practice, we will help our youth to grow into resilient, vulnerable and independent adults.

As a Niagara Catholic family, we are a community of faith, love and hope. Everything we do is student centered, and to achieve our collective vision, we will work together to build and nurture healthy minds and open hearts.

Larry Huibers  
Chair of the Board of Trustees

***“We need to see each child as a gift to be welcomed, cherished and protected.” - Pope Francis***



## Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy Pillars

### ***Mission Statement***

*The Niagara Catholic District School Board, through the charisms of faith, social justice, support and leadership, nurtures an enriching Catholic learning community for all to reach their full potential and become living witnesses of Christ.*

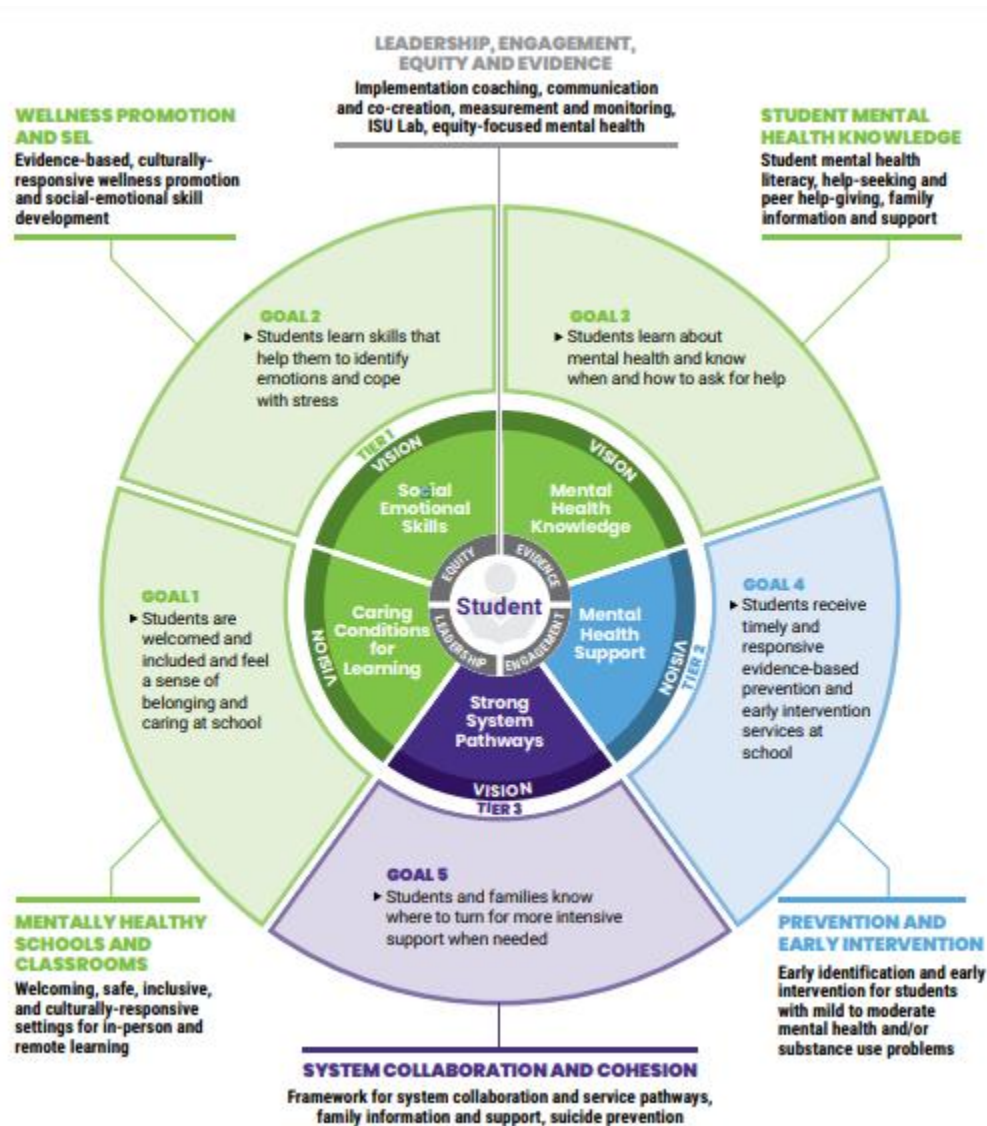
The Niagara Catholic District School Board believes that a student's mental health and well-being is recognized as central to a child's development and learning. As Christ's followers, our faith permeates all aspects of our schools, programs, policies, and procedures. We are a community that responds to students' needs and celebrates the diversity of our community. Every student has equitable access, opportunity for success, and a safe and nurturing environment to grow and succeed.

### ***Vision***

The Niagara Catholic Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is the result of advocacy for mental health and well-being by administrators and staff members. It provides a blueprint for continuing change and a framework to support positive mental health and wellness. Niagara Catholic strives to build a community that understands and reinforces the importance of mental health promotion, prevention and intervention. This three-year plan builds upon the previous *Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* with a focus on wellness, resiliency and positive mental health.

## Values/Commitments

The Niagara Catholic Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is aligned with School Mental Health Ontario's Action Plan. By utilizing resources and supports from SMH-Ontario, Niagara Catholic is dedicated to using evidence-based resources, student-centered thinking, and is aligned with Ontario's curriculum



## Goals and Priorities for 2021-2024

To achieve our collective vision, we work together with schools on five priorities for 2021-2024

- **COVID-19 Recovery**-creating safe and accepting environments to return to, and to address the anxiety, isolation, potential trauma and impact of COVID-19
- **Equity, Inclusivity and Diversity: Anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous, anti-discrimination, 2SLGBTQ+** supporting specific populations in our community who may require more or unique mental health and well-being support and services
- **The link between our faith and mental health**-being intentional in our messaging to staff and students, that our faith and mental well-being are inter-connected
- **Social-Emotional Learning**-embedding SEL into our curriculum and learning
- **Pathways to Care**-ensuring students receive timely and responsive, evidence-based prevention and early intervention services at school and in community



## Strategies

For 2021-2024, we have five key strategies to achieve these goals:

- Welcoming, safe, inclusive, and culturally-responsive schools for in-person and remote learning
- Evidence-based, culturally-responsive wellness promotion and social-emotional skill development
- Early identification and early intervention for students with mild to moderate mental health and/or substance use problems
- Framework for system collaboration and service pathways, both in the schools and community
- Departmental collaboration to embed mental wellness in all areas

Pandemic Recovery	Equity, Inclusivity and Diversity	Faith and Mental Health	Social-Emotional Learning	Pathways to Care
Strategies	Strategies	Strategies	Strategies	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcoming and safe environments for students</li> <li>• Professional development for school professionals focused on re-engagement and anxiety</li> <li>• Evidence-based programming in classroom settings focused on resiliency</li> <li>• Mental health supports and services for identified students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of an equity committee with various stakeholders</li> <li>• Student census and student voice to inform the decisions made</li> <li>• Focus on marginalized students in planning and delivery of curriculum, programming and services</li> <li>• Professional development with a focus on anti-black racism, 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous and marginalized groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying intentional links between our faith and mental health and wellness</li> <li>• Embedding mental health components into faith formations with elementary chaplains</li> <li>• Collaboration between mental health and chaplaincy teams for grief responses, compassionate care and crisis response</li> <li>• Professional development to include both faith and mental health components together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness mornings (K-8) "I Am A Child of God" that focus on SEL</li> <li>• Support Kindergarten teams with social-emotional learning strategies and tools through the 4- frames of the kindergarten program</li> <li>• Development of Tier 1 Social-Emotional Learning Resources in the NCVLE</li> <li>• Rollout of Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource and the Ontario Catholic Graduate School Expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth of the Mental Health and Wellness team</li> <li>• Mental Health Transformation and Core Service Provider</li> <li>• Collaboration in the Community to improve timely access to service</li> <li>• New pathways to service for Hospice Niagara for grief and bereavement services</li> <li>• Promotion of specialized services (CARSA, sex-trafficking victims, Hospice Niagara, victim services)</li> </ul>



## Core Elements of the 3-Year Strategy

### **Organizational Conditions to Focus on**

#### ***Active Mental Health Leadership Team***

A new Mental Health and Well-Being Leadership Team will be created in 2021, including the Mental Health Team, curriculum leads, special education staff, school staff, and various stakeholders.

#### ***Standard Processes and Protocols***

Niagara Catholic has created and implemented the *Compassionate Care Response Guide*, and *Protocol for Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention*, and facilitated the roll-out of the *School Mental Health Decision Support Tool* to administrators and staff. Niagara Catholic will continue to review, update and complete protocols between community partners to ensure consistency with how supports are accessed internally and externally for students. Niagara Catholic Social Workers will continue to utilize EMHware to support the retention and storage of confidential student records.

#### ***Systematic Professional Learning and Training***

Staff at Niagara Catholic have been prepared for their roles in supporting student mental health, beyond basic mental health awareness. Specific staff groups have been trained in ASIST, safeTALK, and more thorough mental health training, and all staff have received basic mental health awareness training. Professional development focused on recovery from the pandemic, marginalized populations/equity (anti-black racism, indigenous learning, 2SLGBTQ+), sex-trafficking and SEL will be the focus.

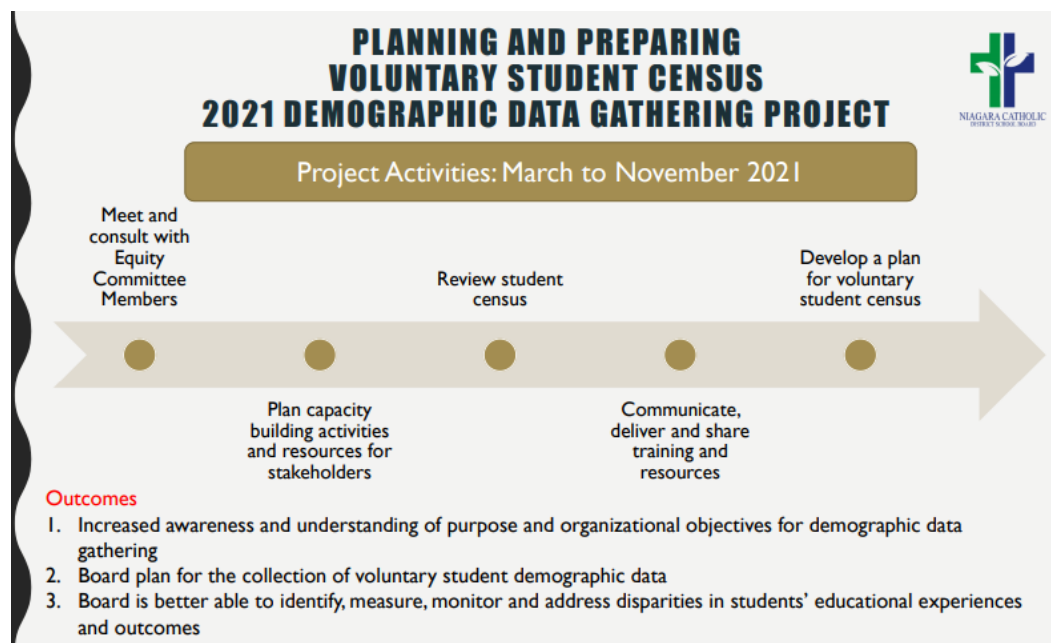
#### ***Meaningful Engagement and Collaboration***

Niagara Catholic supports the input and feedback from schools, families, youth and community in the creation of the Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy. Data is used from Brock University's COMPASS surveys and Niagara Region Public Health to inform us of the needs of the system, and statistics and feedback from community partners is used to inform the priorities. Data and feedback will be used from our Strategic Planning process, COMPASS surveys and a youth census to inform future planning.

***To assess your school's organizational conditions, click here <https://smho-smso.ca/school-and-system-leaders/take-action/planning-tools/>***

### **Supporting Specific Populations**

Niagara Catholic has created an Equity Committee, with representation from various stakeholders in our Board, schools and community. Through the Equity Committee, Niagara Catholic will be building upon previous work and professional development, beginning with a demographic data gathering project in 2021, through a student census. This will include the collection of information about first language spoken, Indigenous identity, ethnic origin, race, religion or spiritual affiliation, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, status in Canada and socio-economic status.



Based on the feedback from our stakeholder groups, Niagara Catholic will identify what we can do to enhance anti-discrimination and equity based learning for students. Equity goals/outcomes will be included in the Board and School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being and Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

Niagara Catholic has also developed a partnership with *Tools of Empowerment for Success (TOES) Niagara*, launching *What They See Is What They Will Be*, a powerful mentorship program to support students in Grades 6 to 12. This program is designed to meet the needs of Black youth across specific industries and career fields addressing racial disparities and policy and program outcomes, such as data analysis, health and mental health, education, literary and the performing arts, social impact and innovation and entrepreneurship. The Niagara Catholic District School Board has received a grant of \$25,000 from the Niagara Community Foundation to support the implementation of this program. Mentors will receive training in cultural competencies and racial nuances.

At Niagara Catholic, our Indigenous Lead has focused on the expansion of our Indigenous programming and team. Through the hiring of new staff in 2021-2024 (Indigenous Curriculum Teacher, graduation lead) we will ensure that our schools are provided with guidance and leadership through an Indigenous lens. Every Niagara Catholic school has identified an Indigenous Champion, and professional development in 2021-2024 will be provided to staff.

**Community Programs In Our Classrooms: Promotion, Prevention and Awareness**

Organization	Program Description	Intended Audience	Contact Information	Contact Person
<b>Big Brothers Big Sisters</b>	<p><b>In-School Mentoring</b> Provides girls and boys with a role model and a friend to talk to and share the experiences of growing up within school grounds. Play games, hang out on the playground etc.</p> <p><b>Go Girls</b> Group mentoring program that focuses on physical activity, balanced eating and self-esteem</p> <p><b>Game On</b> Group mentoring program for boys that focuses on physical activities, healthy eating, life skills, communication and emotional health.</p>	<p>Elementary</p> <p>Girls 12 – 14</p> <p>Boys Group</p>	<p>St. Catharines: 905-646-3230</p> <p>Niagara Falls: 905-357-5454</p> <p>Welland: 905-735-0570</p>	
<b>CARSA</b>	<p><b>Child Assault Prevention (CAP)</b> An empowerment program that gives children strategies they can use in potentially abusive and dangerous situations. Age-appropriate discussions and role-playing address bullying, strangers and abuse by someone they know. Their rights to be ‘safe, strong and free’ are emphasized.</p> <p><b>Youth Issues</b> Students learn how to recognize different types of abuse and effective skills and strategies they can use in these situations. Topics covered include bullying, peer pressure, sexual assault and harassment, healthy relationships, internet safety and self-defense.</p>	<p>Grades 1 – 6</p> <p>Grades 7 – 8</p>	<p>Niagara Sexual Assault Centre 43 Church St., Suite 503 St. Catharines, ON L2R 7E1</p> <p>Business line: 905.682.7258</p> <p>Crisis line: 905.682.4584</p> <p><a href="http://niagarasexualassaultcentre.com">http://niagarasexualassaultcentre.com</a></p>	Donna Christie

	<p><b>For Grade 8's only</b>  This program is designed to prepare students for situations they are likely to encounter in high school. Topics include drug and alcohol-facilitated sexual assaults, acquaintance sexual assaults, relationships and internet safety.</p> <p>Sexual Harassment  Legal Issues  Dating/Violence/Sexual Assault  The Undetected Rapist  Girls' Grade 9 program  Boys' Grade 9 program  Child Sexual Abuse</p>	Grade 8		
		Secondary School		Suzanne Mason
<b>CASON Community Addiction Services of Niagara</b>	<p><b>Health Promotion</b>  Health promotion provides awareness, partnership and prevention education through a human lens with harm reduction in the forefront. CASON initiatives include sharing through information, recent statistics, and lived experience while encouraging people to embrace the idea of their own healthy lifestyle.</p> <p>Information is provided to the community through a variety of media including presentations, speaking engagements, events and health fair exhibits. Presentations can be customized to include causes of problem substance use/gambling/tech addictions/vaping, risk factors, trends, addiction in the family, mindfulness and information on the many programs and services.</p>	Grades 5-12	905-684-1183 ext. 312	Marnie Prokator
<b>Niagara Falls Community Health Center</b>	<p><b>2SLGBTQ+ Support:</b>  groups, one-on-one, family support, classroom education</p>	All students	<a href="mailto:cturner@nfchc.ca">cturner@nfchc.ca</a> 289-321-0588 905-356-4222 ext. 311	Celeste Turner, 2SLGBTQ+ Support Coordinator

<b>Niagara Regional Police</b>	<b>School Resource Officers:</b> Support safe and accepting schools	All students	Secondary schools have access to their identified School Resource Officer. Elementary schools can access support through the secondary school administrator.	
<b>Niagara Region Public Health</b>	<b>School Health</b> (programming, presentations and support)	All students	905-401-8179 alison.jacobs@niagararegion.ca	Manager: Alison Jacobs or reach out to your school public health nurse
<b>Kristen French Advocacy Center</b>	<b>Teen Connect</b> -Prevention education presentation, designed to raise awareness, educate and inform students on the types of child abuse, what it can look like and sound like, and what to do if they or someone they know may be experiencing abuse.	Grades 7-8 (In Person) Grade 9 (HT component tied in, in-person)	kkaior@kristenfrenchcacn.org 905-937-5435 x. 7024	Keegan Kaior
<b>Quest Community Health Center</b>	<b>2SLGBTQ+ Support:</b> groups, one-on-one, family support, classroom education	Youth aged 12+	svail@questchc.ca cell 905 380-4576 (call or text) office 905 688-2558 ex 222	Stephanie Vail, Community Health Worker
<b>Young Caregivers Association</b>	Respite program for youth who take on extra responsibility in their home. Lessons include self-care, self-esteem, coping skills and other topics relevant to caregiving.	Young caregivers, grades 2-8	jtownson@powerhouseproject.ca	Jamie Townson, community Engagement Facilitator
<b>YWCA</b>	<b>Teen Talk S.T.E.P.S.</b>	Teen Talk-Grades 9-12 STEPS-Grades 4-8	sdc@ywcaniagararegion.ca	Vikki Holder

### ***Enhancing System Coordination and Access to Mental Health Services***

In Niagara, there is a considerable amount of community collaboration revolving around children's mental health. The Niagara Catholic District School Board is a participating member at our Community Core Service Provider Committee, the Mental Health Transformation Table, Community Service Sector Niagara, and has more focused involvement with individual agencies with services within the schools.

In 2021-2024, the pathways and services to care for youth in Niagara will be reviewed and transformed, to ensure equitable access to care, in a timely way. Referrals for service through Contact Niagara as our central hub, will be streamlined to ensure families can access services without having to re-share their stories, and agencies will collaborate to update policies and procedures to ensure there is no duplication of service, and all students are serviced. The Niagara Catholic District School Board has increased the Mental Health Team to include Child and Youth Workers for evidence based programming, and Social Work support for clinical intervention and counselling with students within the school setting. Our partnership with Pathstone Mental Health's school based program, and Community Addiction Services counselling program will remain in our schools, with enhanced pathways to care.



## **Niagara Catholic District School Board Mental Health Team**

Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education

Andrea Bozza, Mental Health Lead

Taylor Burciul, Social Worker

Sabrina Fruci, Social Worker

Jennifer Gallant, Social Worker

Samantha Hutchinson, Social Worker

Jennifer Monteith, Social Worker

Andrea Prest, Social Worker

Samantha Smyth, Social Worker

Jonathan Trevisonn, Social Worker

Elementary and Secondary Child and Youth Workers