



## **NORTHWEST TERRITORIES JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 12 SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM POLICY**

### **PURPOSE**

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has established this policy to guide the *Northwest Territories (NWT) Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (JK-12) School-based Mental Health and Wellness Programs* in partnership with regional Education Bodies.

This policy sets out the provisions that qualify for School-based Mental Health and Wellness Services. It follows a joint model between ECE and the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) for providing a range of mental health support services to children, youth, and families in the NWT. The levels of service available across systems are:

- Level 1: Mental Health and Wellness Promotion
- Level 2: Mental Health Prevention and Early Intervention
- Level 3: Clinical Counselling
- Level 4: Acute and Specialized Care

ECE is committed to working with Education Bodies to establish, maintain, and monitor their regional programs for offering all students with the essential support to promote positive mental health and well-being. In accordance with the joint model between ECE and DHSS, the regional Education Bodies are responsible for delivering Level 1 and 2 services for Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 students.

### **PRINCIPLES**

Education Bodies will provide their Level 1 & 2 mental health and wellness supports through the guiding principles of trauma-informed, culturally informed, wise practices, person-centered, compassionate leadership, and inclusive education, as outlined in *The NWT Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 School-based Mental Health and Wellness Framework*.

### **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all Education Bodies in the territory, with regard to the use of funding for Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 school-based mental health and wellness programs and services.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Education Body:** A District Education Authority, a Divisional Education Council, a Commission scolaire francophone de division, the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency (TCSA), or all of them as the case may be.

**Externalizing Mental Health Concerns:** Behaviours and issues that are directed outward and disrupt



normal functioning in life. These behaviours may include impulsiveness, opposition, difficulty in forming relationships, trouble with attention, and aggression.

**Health and Social Services Professionals:** include related health and support services such as Occupational Therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists, Physiotherapists, Social Workers, Addictions and Mental Health Counsellors, Educational Psychologists, Pediatricians and Child Psychiatrists.

**Internalizing Mental Health Concerns:** Emotional and psychological struggles that are directed inward and significantly impact an individual's daily function and overall wellness when left unaddressed. It is easy to overlook these struggles as they are not overtly evident. Individuals struggling with internalizing mental health concerns often exhibit signs of excessive worry, social isolation, low mood, low self-esteem, and a lack of interest in activities they once enjoyed.

**Mental Health:** State of psychological and emotional well-being that is necessary for living a healthy life and a main factor in overall health. Good mental health allows for people to feel, think, and act in ways that help them enjoy life and cope with its challenges. This can be positively or negatively influenced by life experiences, relationships with others, work or school environment, physical health, and community.

**Mental Health Concern:** Concerns about an individual's mental health arise when they present with abrupt changes to their baseline behaviour or demonstrate poor mental health practices.

**Mental Health Prevention:** Taking action or intervening to minimize the progression of mental health concerns by addressing risk factors and building protective factors (i.e., skills in emotional regulation, coping, problem-solving, etc.) before a specific mental illness has been identified.

**Mental Health Promotion:** Encourages and facilitates protective factors and behaviours that support overall mental health and wellness. It involves empowering individuals to cultivate and sustain healthy routines, relationships, and lifestyles that contribute to positive mental health outcomes, even when faced with life's stressors and challenges.

**School Based Mental Health and Wellness Provider:** is the term that encompasses the various roles established by Education Bodies throughout the territory under the School-Based Mental Health and Wellness Program. They are the individuals who implement proactive and preventative interventions in response to student wellness needs within Levels 1 and 2.

**Whole-school Approach:** all members of the school community (school administration, teaching and non-teaching staff, students, parents and families) play an active role in promoting mental health and wellness.

## PROVISIONS

The conditions for authorized spending under this policy will be detailed in the *School-based Mental*



*Health and Wellness Program Guidelines.* Funding under this Policy must be used solely for mental health and wellness programs and services aligned with the following priorities:

1. Allocate resources to implement a whole-school approach to safe and caring schools through a lens of mental health and wellness promotion:
  - a. Ensure school staff and wellness teams are trained to implement services that promote the mental health and wellness of students.
  - b. Implement culturally safe and informed programs and interventions that promote a holistic approach to mental health and wellness (physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing).
  - c. Implement trauma-informed practices and services designed to raise recognition and understanding of support requirements for students who may experience traumatic stress or adverse life experiences.
  - d. Support the implementation of programs and strategies focused on mental health literacy and reducing mental health stigma.
2. Allocate resources to provide students with access to developing positive mental health behaviours and prevention interventions such as emotional regulation, coping, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving strategies and skills:
  - a. Support Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 educators in implementing mental health and wellness programs, activities, and resources, such as social-emotional learning, self- and co-regulation, and emotional problem-solving.
  - b. Provide access to a mental wellness provider in support of the above skill development through classroom-based, small groups, and one-to-one approaches.
  - c. General school staff training to increase awareness and implementation of strategies for promoting mental health and prevention interventions by providing emotional support and skill development to students.
3. Allocate resources towards responding early and effectively to the mental health needs of students:
  - a. Develop a school community where staff and wellness teams recognize early signs of mental health concerns for prevention interventions and connections to services.
  - b. Develop regional and school-based practices and procedures that recognize and support the internalizing and externalizing mental health concerns of students.
  - c. Develop school-based processes that leverage local resources to identify and support students who may benefit from Level 2, 3 or 4 services.
4. Allocate resources to partnering with families, communities, and health and social services professionals to enhance system capacity in supporting the mental health needs of all students:
  - a. Support referral processes to health and social services across Level 3 and 4 services through communication and system navigation as per program standard operating procedures.
  - b. Consistent practices and procedures for student referrals to Level 2 services accessible by students, families, education staff, and external partners in health and social services.



## AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Under section 126 (2) of the *Education Act*, the Minister shall (b) establish standards for the education program and (d) take the steps necessary to maintain the standards for the education program at the highest level possible.

Under section 128(1) of the *Education Act*, the Minister may, by means of a contribution, provide funding required for the delivery of the education program.

As such, funding provided to Education Bodies for school-based mental health and wellness services must be used for the sole purpose of supporting students in accordance with this *NWT Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 School-based Mental Health and Wellness Services Policy*. Education Bodies must maintain appropriate and detailed financial and activity records on how and for what purpose funding has been spent through the Education Accountability Framework.

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

1. *School-based Mental Health and Wellness Program Framework*
2. *School-based Mental Health and Wellness Program Guidelines*
3. *School Funding Framework*
4. *Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 Planning and Accountability Framework*