

Teachers of Tomorrow: Advancing School Wellness Through Teacher Preparation

Progress Report - November 2019

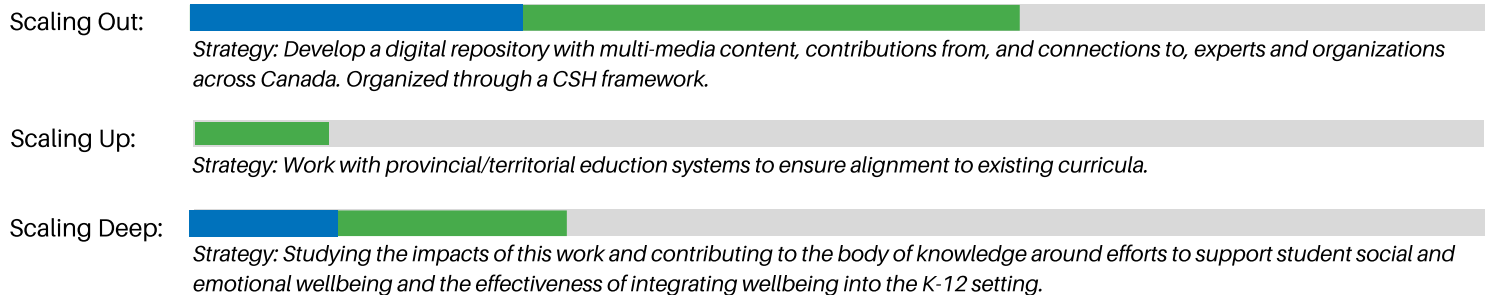


Overview

Over the past year we have worked to scale wellness practices and education across the country in Bachelors of Education (B.Ed) programs through a Comprehensive School Health (CSH) approach. The diagrams below indicate our progress from this year relative to both student level and systems level impact across all three scaling strategies. The blue bars demonstrate progress in the previous reporting period and the green bars indicate progress in the 2018-19 grant term.

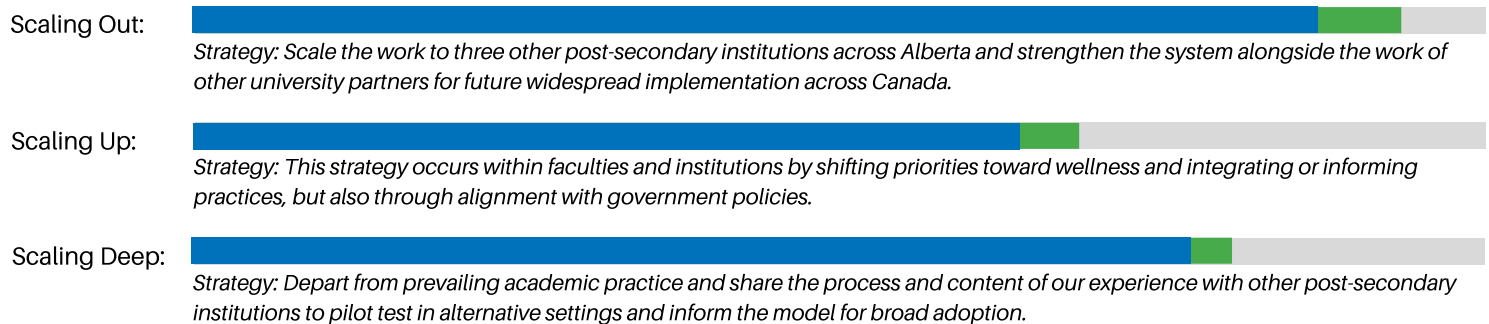
A note about terminology: The language in this report reflects an intentionally broad use of the term well-being, and is used interchangeably with wellness. While we acknowledge the priority of WellAhead is specific to social-emotional well-being, a multi-dimensional approach to well-being has a few advantages. It reinforces the interdependency of the dimensions, avoids the equation of "wellness" with any one dimension (i.e., physical health), and increases local autonomy enabling initiative alignment with site-specific capacity and priorities.

Student Level Impact



These strategies, which aim to impact the K-12 student level, will be further advanced in the next two years. Because we are working at the post-secondary level, time is required to see the impacts at the K-12 student level. With a change in provincial government in Alberta, provincial curriculum development has been halted and implementation delayed. This has affected the scaling up strategy, more detail can be found in the following pages.

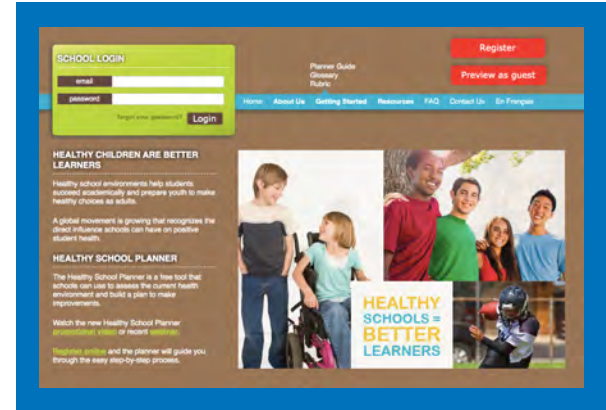
Systems Level Impact



To date we have engaged a total of 18 institutions across the country in this work. Working through a CSH approach, we have begun to shift priorities and break through the traditional boundaries in regards to sharing content and processes between institutions. The next three pages of this report dive deeper into the progress made on these strategies through some stories from the field, lessons learned, and lessons still to learn.

Primary Project Sites - The Healthy School Planner

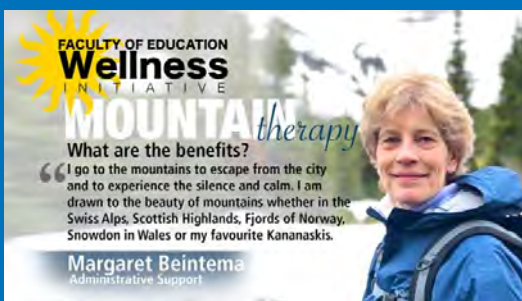
To help assess progress and identify areas for further action, the primary project sites have been using the Joint Consortium for School Health's Healthy School Planner Tool. While this tool was created for and validated in K-12 educational settings, we've found it to be useful for the advanced education setting—with a few adjustments for context. Three primary project sites have completed the planner twice now and on average saw an increase in level (1. Initiating, 2. Taking Action, 3. Achieving Success, 4. Maintaining Momentum) on their rubrics in 42% of indicators. Completing the tool has resulted in a number of great conversations and tangible outcomes for the committees. More details on what the primary project sites have been up to can be found on the following pages.



University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education - A Healthy School Culture

When you walk into Turcotte Hall at the University of Lethbridge (UofL) you can feel the healthy school community that has been built at the Faculty of Education, led by a diverse team of wellness champions from the faculty (students, staff and faculty), campus and community. UofL has taken an embedded approach, focusing on advancing the well-being of their students, staff and faculty. Throughout the year the committee has made an effort to ensure that their students enter their faculty on day one with an understanding of the Faculty's commitment to wellness. Students arrived on their orientation day to a welcoming focused on wellness and how they can be well throughout their journey at the UofL and then spent their first class bonding with their fellow teacher candidates through a number of wellness focused activities (including mindfulness walks, fitness and cooking classes). In the days that followed this orientation students expressed their gratitude to the faculty for setting a tone for the year that made them feel welcomed and supported.

Students in their second professional semester had an opportunity to dive a bit deeper into what it means to be a health champion for their future students when they leave the doors of UofL and enter classrooms across the province as teachers. On a cold day at the end of January, all students in their second professional semester spent a half day, in place of their traditional course time, learning about the CSH approach and how they could bring this to life in their future teaching practice.



Taking a multi-dimensional approach to wellness, the committee members took the time to have conversations with a variety of personnel in their building. They struck conversations with administrative staff, faculty members, instructors, alumni, and more, around the ways in which individuals in the faculty support their own well-being: mountain therapy, walking with family, canoeing, golfing. These conversations developed into images and quotes shared broadly across the faculty on monitors and social media. They will soon be profiled in a university-wide publication to showcase the innovative work within the education faculty. These conversations have led to a culture of well-being within the faculty. Students, staff, and faculty members can see the work of the committee daily and it has led to a wonderful, welcoming environment to work, play and learn in.

Concordia University of Edmonton Faculty of Education - *Students as Change Agents*

The small but committed Faculty of Education at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE) has seen the power of student voice drive their work to elevate the profile of wellness. The Health and Wellness Committee at CUE has flourished this year, making a difference in the experiences of the students in this quick, after-degree only, Bachelor of Education program. The Faculty invited participation in the committee with an impressive response: students from both years overwhelmingly expressed interest in being involved. This committee, which is more than 75% student-led, has made student voice a real focus.

Students on the committee drafted and disseminated a survey to their peers to better understand how to improve the culture within the faculty and better support each other throughout their two-year journey together. Survey results indicated that students did not feel connected to one another or the faculty, nor did they feel supported in the current physical environment to take time to support their well-being.

The committee wanted to help equip the students at CUE with the tools needed to support both their own personal well-being and the well-being of their future students. So, based on the feedback from this survey and modelled after the event at the University of Lethbridge, all first-year students were brought together (and many second years attended voluntarily) on a Friday in September. They spent the day learning about CSH, how to support the mental well-being of their future students, and the supports available to them on the larger CUE campus. A panel of second year students spoke to their journeys and answered tough questions from the first years about balancing the many demands of being a teacher candidate.



The day ended with a call out for further participation on the Health and Wellness Committee. Once again, the response was staggering. Students in the room took time to speak with the event organizers and members of senior administration at the faculty, discussing how impressed they were that the faculty was truly valuing their health and well-being and equipping them to support their future students' health and well-being.

University of Alberta Faculty of Education - *Strategic Alignment of Actions & Priorities*

The team at the University of Alberta (U of A), small but mighty and guided by leading researchers in Canada in CSH, is working to further embed wellness into a large and complex faculty. Because of the expanse of this faculty, the committee has had to be strategic with their actions and priorities. The support of senior faculty administration has made this complex task more manageable.

This team has been intentional in finding avenues to capitalize on the work already happening within the faculty. They conducted environmental and program scans to highlight where work exists to support health and wellness and how to build upon it. One key opportunity for growth was the Faculty's newly written strategic plan, which included wellness and came with additional funding through a grant opportunity to support wellness-related activities within the faculty.

Through the strategic plan funding, the committee hosted a one-day event in early September to further understand the need for wellness supports. At the event, students had the opportunity to hear firsthand from a recent graduate about the importance of embedding wellness in their programming and teaching practices. Next, they attended concurrent sessions focused on the priority areas of CSH and how to consider wellness throughout the rest of their program. To cap the day off, students were invited to participate in a series of focus groups, led by faculty members, to further understand key concerns and how the faculty can address them.

Over the coming months, the committee is focused on disseminating the results from these focus groups to help elevate the profile of, and need for, wellness supports across their large and complex faculty.

The Werklund School of Education (WSE) introduced the first mandatory course in Canada to systemically address health and wellness through pre-service teachers: EDUC 551. The 2019 cohort saw 482 pre-service teachers receive 39 hours of instruction on CSH, bringing the two-year total to 1,072 pre-service teachers trained in CSH.

Students were again offered opportunities to participate in related research, such as submitting a 'Letter to their Future Teacher Self' for thematic analysis. One key concern that surfaced during the analysis of these letters, and further through the experience of interacting with students across the country, was the narrative around teacher burnout. Key themes in the letters included anticipation of burnout, possible attrition from the profession, and exaggerated expectations. A paper further discussing these findings is currently in review. In a variety of project sites, this narrative is pervasive and systemic. We're beginning to investigate how we can shift the rhetoric from surviving to thriving in the profession. Disrupting this narrative is a key focus of WSE's Health Champions Committee for the next year.

In addition to thematic analysis on the letters, quantitative data was collected through pre- and post-course surveys. Analysis of this data showed increased value of CSH; self-efficacy to use CSH; self-efficacy to teach healthy relationships, and handling youth disclosures of dating violence; and a decrease in body dissatisfaction and weight bias. The third iteration of the course will run in January 2020 with some small updates: a larger focus on teacher well-being, and intentional messaging around teacher burnout.

Over the past year WSE has also worked to expand their health champions committee to include more faculty members, undergraduate students, community partners and faculty members from allied faculties. The committee is working on building out an action plan for the coming years and building relationships with the new Dean in the faculty.

Lessons Learned

- **The upstream/downstream paradox:** Teacher candidates have a dual role in the context of their post-secondary experience - they are both student and teacher. When viewed as a teacher, working towards improved well-being is an upstream strategy that enhances personal and professional competency and can assist in the prevention of future health concerns for themselves and their students. When viewed as a student, working towards improved well-being is downstream whereby they arrive in advanced education settings with existing conditions, mindsets and capacities that could have been supported further up the stream in K-12 education.
- **The education continuum:** Promoting healthy learning environments is important for healthy growth and development and optimal learning across the education continuum. We have come to recognize that for teachers, the education continuum is a perfect circle, meaning they experience the K-12 education system as learners, go on to a post-secondary experience, and then return to the K-12 system as teachers. Addressing well-being in all faculties on campus is thus appropriate; however, there is an accelerated impact on population health and the education system when education faculties prioritize wellness for their learners, because they will both experience healthy learning environments and go on to influence them.
- **Skilled network weavers:** As directed in feedback from WellAhead staff on our previous progress report, we have recognized the importance of skilled network weavers to mobilize resources. Thus, while it was always a tactic in the project plan to support primary project sites with staff time (a skilled coordinator) to guide the process of embedding wellness, we have extended this support to two other intersecting tactics. The first is the nature of support provided to corresponding sites: this process will be formalized for the next stage of the project by inviting 5 new pilot sites to enroll and more actively participate in embedding wellness in their programs with a dedicated coordinator (compared to a passive communication relationship). The second is the dissemination and use of the newly launched learning platform, cshhub.com. By leveraging other dollars to complete the platform, funding is available to channel human resources to assist project sites in sharing post-secondary resources in the online bank, and to promote access to developed coursework for in-service teachers.

Lessons Still to Learn

- **Teacher and staff wellbeing** may be the most effective entry point for advancing well-being in both faculty and students in BEd. programs because of its ability to increase value for wellness, a prerequisite for any future changes to behaviour or environments. This appears to be recognized by many sites in the following ways:
 - University of Lethbridge's attention to Faculty Wellness Profiles (see above);
 - Mount Royal University's target to launch a course in Spring 2020 centring around teacher and staff wellbeing;
 - Werklund School of Education's wellness committee priority objective to shift the narrative of burnout across the program.
- **BEd. program entry requirements** differ across institutions, and the requirements themselves may be a factor in teacher retention. For example, one program requires students to complete a prerequisite course that places them as a volunteer in a classroom for 6 weeks to gain a sense of whether the realities of the profession are a good fit for their expectations. The recommendation of the host teacher is then considered as a factor in admission to the program. Other schools admit students based on GPA alone and still others combine GPA with interviews to assess soft skills.

These emerging lessons offer perhaps the greatest potential to impact on the system of education through deep underlying mindsets of the profession, and through upward campus policy recommendations. They warrant further exploration and intentional learning over the next year.

Challenges & Potential Solutions

With a change in provincial government in Alberta, provincial curriculum development has been halted and implementation delayed. The Ministerial Order on Student Learning is also under review, with changes to competencies expected. This requires us to re-think our scaling up strategy of aligning coursework and programming with these policies and standards of practice in the K-12 setting. The potential solution here is to pivot to focus on alignment of policies between post-secondary schools and school boards (rather than to ministerial policies). Specifically, we can seek and amplify alignment on the wellness-related policies of school boards (that guide and inform school development plans) and faculty strategic plans.

Next Steps

The activities and progress, along with the adjustments to activities derived from learnings and challenges noted above have been embedded in an updated project work plan.

Stepping back from the term of this project and viewing it as a foundation for ongoing system change that is likely to occur over the next decade, we are beginning to outline some next steps that we hope WellAhead can assist with, to the extent that this role is seen to align with your purpose. Having loosely scoped out a ten-year goal to have a National Centre of Excellence dedicated to well-being across the education continuum, we've identified an interim dual-track step of implementation (i.e. a continuation of this project) and research. We imagine there may be funding opportunities for each track separately, and some for both together. We'd be pleased to have WellAhead (McConnell Foundation) assist in any introductions or connections that could facilitate these opportunities. Additionally or alternately, some learning opportunities directed at understanding and appealing to funding motivations and the priorities of the next highest power would be appreciated as you consider support to project sites this year. Some avenues we've identified (for funding or priority connections) are the International Union for Health Promotion in Education - the International Collaboration on Teacher Education and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Please find attached our financial report and the recap from the 2019 National Forum on Wellness in Post-Secondary Education, for your interest.