

School-based Mental Health Project Publicity

Title

Enhancing school-based mental health interventions in Calgary

Overview

A team of researchers at the Mathison Centre are working with the Calgary Board of Education to develop targeted/tier 2 level interventions for students identified as at risk of developing mental illness. The most prevalent mental health disorders among youth include depression, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, externalizing behaviour problems and anxiety (Erskine et al; 2017). Targeted interventions will be an enhancement on CBE's existing tier 1 mental health interventions, such as the "Go to Educator" program, which trains school staff to recognize and respond to students experiencing mental health challenges.

Backstory

Researchers at the Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research & Education and educators at the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) are well ahead in a partnership to improve access to and delivery of enhanced mental health services offered across CBE schools. The transformational 3-year project funded by the City of Calgary under Calgary's Mental Health and Addiction Strategy is expected to result in the development of interventions that target students identified as at risk of mental illness. Experts on school based mental health suggest that collaborative approaches such as envisioned in this project are critical to ensure that interventions developed are effective and well-suited to the school environment.

The project is broken into 3 major phases. Phase 1 started in 2021 where the team began systematically reviewing the available evidence on how to measure mental health in schools and how to provide support for students at risk of developing mental illness. Phase 2, currently in progress, is focused on interviewing CBE students and staff to identify their priorities and recommendations for how to improve mental health services in schools. In the spring of 2023, the team conducted group discussions with students and teachers in Grades 7-9 and individual interviews with staff members in non-teaching roles (e.g., system principals, wellbeing specialists). In the fall of 2023, the team plans to recruit additional students and staff in Grades 7-9 as well as expand on the existing pool of participants to include students and staff in Grades 10-12. To ensure that interventions developed are valid district-wide, the research is expanding recruitment to students and staff across multiple schools in the CBE. The interventions developed will be tested in select CBE schools.

Tier 2 interventions are a critical need for students demonstrating mental, emotional, and behavioural problems who are at risk of developing mental illness. The research team is confident that combining student and staff perspectives to generate recommendations for new ways to support these students is critical for CBE schools. Findings of the study will be shared

across the Calgary schools community with the hope that it can help other schools and school districts identify ways to provide enhanced mental health support to their students.

For more information, please contact mathison.centre@ucalgary.ca