

Beyond the Physical - Outlining the Many Benefits of Getting Active in the TDSB

The Public Health Agency of Canada describes positive mental health as “a state of well-being that allows us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face” (2015)¹. The importance of incorporating mental health and physical activity as a whole is imperative as “we sometimes lose sight of the fact that the mind, brain, and body all influence one another. In addition to feeling good when you exercise, you feel good about yourself.” (Ratey, 2010)².

Physical activity promotes student well-being and wellness and we must be proactive to ensure this goal is achieved. Numerous studies from the Public Health Agency of Canada and PHE Canada have suggested that daily physical activity “has been shown to be beneficial for physical and mental health and positively related to academic performance” (Allison et al., 2015)³. The 23 1/2 Hours video by Dr. Michael Evans⁴ shares and demonstrates the importance of being physically active and how it can help prevent or decrease various illnesses. In the 2013 TDSB Census, it was concluded that “there is a strong relationship between students’ emotional well-being and their physical health”. All students participate in Health and Physical Education at the elementary level including DPA (Daily Physical Activity), as well as having the opportunity to continue throughout secondary courses. The Ontario Curriculum Health and Physical Education (revised) for Grades 1-8 and 9-12 was implemented in September 2015 and focuses on developing ones Physical and Health Literacy with Mental Health and Well-Being embedded in all aspects of learning.

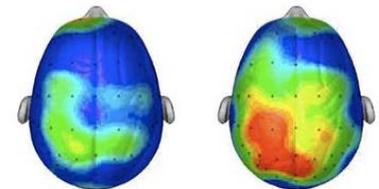
The Health and Physical Education Department has helped put the link between physical and mental health into action by organizing and supporting various events through the TDSB Fit for Life Program. This Board wide commitment to healthy active living supports schools in using the Foundations for a Healthy School as part of their School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (SIPSA). Providing a “healthy, safe and caring social and physical environment supports learning and contributes to the positive cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of students.” (Foundations of a Healthy School, Ministry of Education, 2014). The TDSB Fit for Life Program Menu of Professional Learning offers a variety of professional learning sessions including the opportunity to participate in Wellness Wednesdays and Fit for Life Fridays. These opportunities emphasize the connection between physical activity and one’s social, emotional, and mental well-being. The TDSB Fit for Life Program also features a monthly newsletter that provides information on different supports and resources for educators.

The Health and Physical Education Department has also supported schools in creating Wellness Studios that allow students the opportunity to take part in activities such as fitness classes, fitness circuits, yoga, mindfulness sessions and more. There has also been a rise in the number of students successfully completing the personal fitness course offered at the secondary level. The Health and Physical Education Department recognizes that exercise is preventative medicine. As a learning community we will continue to advocate for student well-being through the advocacy of physical activity.



Students from across the TDSB take part in activities as part of The Celebration Zone at the TDSB Healthy Schools 5k Run/Walk, a Celebration of Healthy Active Living

Composite of 20 student brains taking the same test



After sitting quietly After 20 minute walk

Research/Scan compliments of Dr. Chuck Hillman University of Illinois

The Health and Physical Education Department, through the TDSB Fit for Life Program and through the promotion of quality Health and Physical Education programs is committed to the physical, emotional, social and mental well-being of all our students.

References:

¹Public Health Agency of Canada. (2015). Measuring positive mental health in Canada. Access from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/mhp-psm/pmh-smp-eng.php> accessed on: November 16, 2015.

²Ratey, J. J. (2010). Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain. London, Little, Brown and Company.

³Allison, K., Schoueri-Mychasiw, N., Roberson, J., Hobin, E., Dwyer, J., Manson, H. (2015). Development and implementation of the Daily Physical Activity policy in Ontario, Canada: A retrospective analysis. PHEEx Journal. 6(3), 1-18.

⁴23 ½ Hours, Dr. Michael Evans - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F5Sly9JQao>

(By: The Health and Physical Education Department)



See page 6 for Holiday Wellness Tips

Congratulations Brookmill Jr. PS! Most Active & Healthy School in Canada

Brookmill Jr. P.S. has been a participant in the 60 Minute Kid's Club challenge for the past 5 years. In the 2011-12 school year and again in the 2012-13 school year, Brookmill won the most active and healthy school in our district, province and country. Once again, we are proud to announce Brookmill students have led Canada in the 60 Minute Kid's Club fall challenge for the 2015-16 school year, by placing first amongst all participating schools!

Students are required to track their physical activity, nutrition, amount of screen time, hydration, hours of sleep and mental health on a daily basis by logging into the 60 Minute Kid's Club challenge website. By providing the students an opportunity to monitor their own lifestyle on a daily basis, they are made accountable to themselves as they move through each challenge. At Brookmill, as in all schools, student well-being and mental health is extremely important. The 60 Minute Kid's Club is an integral part of our school improvement plan as it pertains to community culture and caring as well as our Caring and Safe & Accepting School Action Plan. 60 Minute Kid's Club provides periodic reports that provide school rankings throughout the challenges, but more importantly, they include individual student participation scores. Teachers and administration are able to use this to track individual scores and possibly compare them to other data such as school climate surveys, EQAO student surveys and report cards, to measure a student's well-being.

The staff, students, parents and Brookmill community agree that coming in first over all in Canada is quite an accomplishment, and over the past five years, having been presented with banners, a free trip to a Blue Jay game and a visit from a professional break dancer have been a bonus. In the end however, we are unanimous in our belief that it is each individual's mental health and well-being that is most important and that should be motivation enough for being a participant.

(By: Grant MacPherson, Principal at Brookmill Junior Public School)



The Top 10 Reasons to Exercise:

1. Elevates your mood and overall mental wellbeing
2. Improves learning ability and productivity
3. Builds self-esteem and confidence
4. Boosts your immune system
5. Reduces stress
6. Makes you feel happier
7. Has anti-aging effects
8. Improves sleeping patterns
9. Sharpens memory
10. Boosts creative thinking

Adapted from meanrat.com "50 Reasons to Exercise"

My Perspective of Mental & Physical Health at Lanor Jr. Middle School

In our classroom, we do many things to help with our physical and mental health. We can talk about our problems through "Cyphers". In the morning we have "Cypher Time" where we talk about our lives and other topics. We sit in a circle and everyone gets a turn unless they want to pass. This helps you clear your mind if you want to talk about stuff happening in your life. We learn new things every day to help our mental health as well.

In our classroom for physical health, we ask Ms. File to go to the exercise room. She usually says yes. We play volleyball and go on the treadmill, bike, yoga mats and more. Ms. File lets us eat lots of healthy snacks in our classroom. She also brings in healthy snacks. I like when Ms. File lets us cook on Fridays.

We always make healthy snacks like mini pizzas. It keeps us motivated for the rest of the day. We do a lot of things for our mental and physical health. One of my favourite things is going to the exercise room. We also have positive affirmations.

(By: Nika V)



We do things for our physical and mental health in our classroom. We have "Cyphers" and talk about our problems. "Cypher Time" is when we sit in a group, and we have topics to talk about. We choose one to talk about together. I like our "Cypher" because it is fun to talk about things we never get to talk about. "Cyphers" make me feel good.

We all follow Tribes Agreements. They are mutual respect, attentive listening, right to pass and appreciations/no put downs. These agreements are good for our physical and mental health. As well we do gratitude daily. In the mornings, we have to write three things we are thankful for. **You can rewire your brain to be happier when you are thankful.** I am happy with what we do in our class for physical and mental health. (By: Shaun S)



In HSP class, everyone respects our physical and mental health time. Ms. File sends us out for drinks of water whenever we want to but we have to ask. Drinking lots of water is good for our physical health. After we get our work done, we go to the exercise room. **The exercise room is good for our physical and mental health. It works out our body and helps us think.** These are a few of the things we do in the morning to be good to ourselves and others. In the morning, we start our day with a "Cypher". "Cypher Time" is a group discussion in our class where we talk about our feelings and thoughts. I like circle time because I talk about my thoughts and other things. It makes me stay awake. When we do our math work, we put on music. Music helps us think. (By: Jaheim C)

The Stand Up Project

Take a seat. Please sit down. As students we hear these commands countless times throughout our days at school. Having people sit down has become such a simple and ubiquitous method of maintaining organization in classroom and workplace settings - it's become part of society in such a way that we don't even need to think about it anymore.

But when our homeroom teacher, Ms. Guinane, shared some of the recent statistics about health issues related to sitting for long periods, we were shocked. None of the students in our class were very surprised that long periods of inactivity would negatively impact health. Our school, as a Health and Wellness Academy, encourages physical activity all the time as an aspect of healthy living, but sitting for long periods of time is exactly what we do at school every day. Our school is set up for sitting: the benches in the cafeteria, the rows of desks and "seating arrangements" in the classrooms, the chairs lined up in front of each computer in the lab and the couches in the library. We are expected to sit for basically every class except for gym.

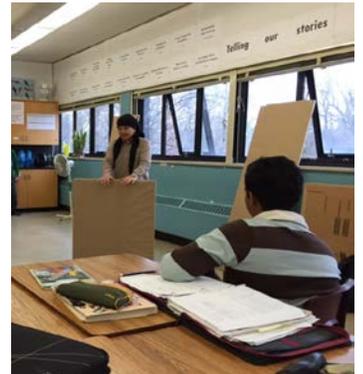
We started brainstorming ideas and asking questions about what we could do to make students' experience at school a healthier one. We knew not everyone would be convinced at first. The teachers especially might be skeptical about classroom management with students standing up. So, we decided to start with our own class to see how it would go. For about a month, Ms. Guinane gave us the choice of standing up or sitting down during lessons, discussions and work time. We each recorded data about how long we stood and how we felt physically, mentally, and emotionally, before, during and after standing.

Our immediate observations were surprising. It was difficult to get used to standing up. Our bodies, first of all, had to adapt to these new conditions. But it wasn't only that, because our newly gained rights also came with a set of responsibilities. We would be allowed to stand as long as we made reasonable decisions on where we stood and made sure we were not obstructing anyone's view or being distracted by people we were standing beside.

Our experiences with standing up varied from person to person. There were some extremely athletic students who chose to sit most of the time as a way to rest their bodies. For others, standing presented many great health benefits. For example, one student in our class found standing up was an effective way to control her blood sugar, which she needs to monitor because she has Type One Diabetes. Many of us felt that standing up improved focus throughout long lessons, and we all appreciated having the choice to sit or stand. It was refreshing and we made good use of the natural light by using the windowsills and counters in our classroom as work surfaces.

After a month of collecting data and comparing our results with one another, we came to a conclusion at the end of our little experiment. We felt that standing did in fact improve the states of our physical and mental health, and that it can be managed at school as long as the terms, conditions and consequences are all communicated clearly from the beginning. Being in one of Canada's Health and Wellness Academies, we decided that we would keep working on this project to optimize standing in class and further integrate it into the other classes in our school. We felt like this was an experience that all the students at Donview could benefit from.

However, our experiment was not without its problems. We discovered many issues related to the work area available to us. We were making do with our classroom's counters and windowsills as tables to write on while standing, and several of us brought our own clipboards to use. These options were all quite uncomfortable and inconvenient, because workspaces were cramped, and work surfaces were narrow and the wrong height for standing with proper posture. What we really needed to make the project work was stand-up tables.



Ms. Tian explains her design-build process and assembles our stand up tables

The next step was to invite our school Principal and Superintendent into our classroom to present our ideas to them and ask for some funds to purchase stand up tables. We got to work, organized in three different committees. The research group looked for some sustainable alternatives to our current stand-up equipment. We needed something that was sensible and affordable, and we ended up with a variety of options, ranging from music stands to store-bought options, to custom-built cardboard stand-up tables, but they were all quite expensive. Luckily, a student's parent Ms. Tian, already had experience in making cardboard furniture and stepped in to help. Ms. Tian offered to design and create tables to fit 3 or 4 standing students. Each table would be just over waist-high, made of only cardboard, tape, paper, glue and nails: a creative, eco-friendly and locally-made initiative.

While we waited on the completion of our tables, our presentation committee planned for the big day. We managed to compress all our ideas and experiences about stand-up education into a thirty minute presentation for our Superintendent and Principal, which (although slightly nerve-wracking) was definitely a rewarding experience. In the end, they agreed to support our initiative and we received some great feedback. Our tables (three in total) came in soon after, IKEA-style, in the form of several cardboard planks.

Now that we have proper furniture, we continue to stand-up in class when we choose, while enjoying the mental, emotional and physical health benefits that standing brings. But we, the documentary committee, don't want things to end here. We want to share our story with more students, teachers and administrators and spread the word about our project. Some day we hope to see standing up as an option for every student in every classroom. We have stood up against sitting down. Will you?

(By: Donview Middle Health and Wellness Academy Student Documentary Committee: Hannah, Charlotte, Zanira, Angela, Elyse, Katharine, & Ms. Guinane)

Yoga in Schools?

The Benefits of Yoga for Physical Well-Being

"Speaking for me personally it has had a substantial impact not only in my sport & academics but also in my search for my personal legend [meaning]. A lot of us never truly get the chance to discover our personal legends because it requires the ability to be mindful and being mindful is not the easiest task living in a society with a plethora of distractions. - David M. - gr. 12

"Yoga has taught me the importance of balance, both physically in terms of muscle imbalances in order to prevent injuries, and being able to move my body in a different (fun!) way. As well as providing me with an outlet mentally, giving me strategies to deal with challenges I face off the mat and helping me find balance inside of my busy schedule! Yoga has become more than a subject at school, it is a practice I have already and plan on continuing to deepen outside of class for years to come!" - Lucy P. - gr. 12

Since September 2014, students at Vaughan Road Academy have had the opportunity to take an Interdisciplinary Credit course, IDC30: *Yoga for Teens: Exploring Paths to Wellness*. The course name is relevant: by focusing explicitly on exploration, we work to ensure that students have opportunities to develop personalized yoga practices, improve their knowledge of the human body (particularly their own), and co-create a learning program that is personally meaningful. This is the very definition of differentiated instruction. The benefits of yoga and mindfulness have recently received much attention in the mainstream press. However, there are many different types and traditions of yoga practice, so where to start? With our students, of course! *Yoga for Teens* (Y4T) has been designed explicitly for young people within the Ontario Curriculum expectations, so students have the opportunity to engage in a program of self-exploration focused on physical and mental wellness. It is important that this is offered for course credit. Though yoga and mindfulness programs offered as extracurricular or "add-ons" to regular course credits are valuable since so many TDSB students benefit from them, offering the Y4T course sends the message to students that their health and wellness is a priority that is at least as important as other learning programs in our schools.

Students at VRA report that what they have learned and actively practiced over a school year in Y4T can be easily taken "off the mat" and into their other classes and personal relationships. The potential benefits are as varied as the practices themselves and differ among our students. We have found that these have helped to reduce stress, cultivate self-awareness, compassion and respect for difference. Interdisciplinary yoga includes elements of social studies, situational ethics, non-violent communication skills as well as both brain science and human physiology. Yoga offers a great deal more than simple stretching. Despite so many avenues for exploration, the physical benefits of yoga in particular are tough to overstate. Recent estimates peg nearly one third of all Toronto youth as "overweight or obese" and a lack of sufficient physical activity has been targeted as the main cause of this trend.¹ Yoga also offers students a respite from what is often a near constant connection to social media, which of course contributes to sedentary lifestyles.² Instead, students are encouraged to turn their attention inward to study how different postures make them feel. They gain valuable practice in connecting with their own bodies in healthy ways. Yoga practice can improve strength and flexibility to be sure. But it

can also empower students to gain focus, concentration and fortitude that can serve them in academics and the stresses of everyday life. Stress and anxiety are now serious challenges for a growing number of the students we teach, something the most recent TDSB student census makes clear.³ Young people practicing yoga take an active role in self-regulation by tuning into and manipulating their breath to feel better. Don't think breath is important? Watch any pro sport for even a few minutes (without volume is best). It quickly becomes clear how central breath is to peak performance.

This is no less true when sitting in class, writing a test, or moving through our daily lives - to say nothing of dealing with mental health challenges like addiction, depression and anxiety. Integrated into the physical practice, breath is a tool that students can use to improve the overall quality of their lives. What a perfect description of what must certainly be a goal for us as educators working with young people.

References:

1 Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). *Addressing obesity in children and youth: evidence to guide action for Ontario*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2013.

2 CAMH: *Social media and student mental health: What's the connection?* http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/CAMH-Discovers/summer-2015/Pages/Social-media-and-student-mental-health.aspx

3 Student and Parent Census, 2011-2012: TDSB Students (Grades 7-12): Emotional Well-Being. <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/2011-12CensusFactSheet2EmotWellbeingPart1.pdf>

(By: Michael Alex, Teacher, Vaughan Road Academy)



Vaughan Road Academy students practice yoga in the IDC30 Course "Yoga for Teens".

We've gone public!

You can now access the Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us Newsletters on the TDSB's external website. To view all issues, past and present, please visit: www.tdsb.on.ca/mentalhealth - click on "Newsletter"

Brookhaven P.S. Fosters Well-Being & Leadership Through Physical Activity

Brookhaven Public School has made a direct connection between physical activity, mental health and educational success for its students by implementing some fun and easy programs that can mesh physical activity into weekly routines and prime students' brains for learning. These initiatives also provide students with leadership and mentorship opportunities by fostering a sense of connection and belonging among the students across all grade levels.

TUNE UP TUESDAY A whole school activity in the gym where all members of the school follow a video of a vigorous workout routine. The activity is supported by Student Council leaders who guide the rest of the students at the front of the gym.

Brookhaven students engage in Fit Friday activities outdoors.



GYM PASS FRIDAY

A student incentive program taking place during the last period of the day on Fridays, when students who have behaved exceptionally well throughout the week receive a gym pass and go to the gym to

have some physical activity time. All the gym equipment is taken out of the storage room, music is pumped up, and a variety of student-directed games are played. Students can obtain a gym pass from any staff member for good behaviour, good work and/or being a good citizen at Brookhaven PS.

RECESS CART Every day a cart of equipment is put out for students to use at recess. It is accessible throughout the day so that all can enjoy the equipment during various breaks.

BROOKHAVEN COUNCIL LEADER 36 student leaders have been trained as P.A.L.S. (Playground Activity Leaders in School). As P.A.L.S., students have a variety of jobs at Brookhaven Public School that promote healthy active living such as, recess cart duty, recess game duty, Fit Friday, Tune Up Tuesday, Milk Program sales, House Leagues, Gym Helpers, and Gym Pass Friday Supervisors. Membership on the Council fosters leadership skills and prepares students to become responsible and caring individuals. Many of the members of the Council have found this leadership role to have a positive impact on their overall success and well-being at school. (By: Jennifer Wright, Principal, John Travaglini, Vice-Principal and Tim Fidler, Teacher at Brookhaven PS)

#MakeYourDayHarder

This year, a new theme was introduced to the James S Bell Junior Middle Sports and Wellness Academy community – "Let's Make our Day Harder." Thanks to the work of Dr. Mike Evans from the Evans Health Lab, we have brought his simple concept to James S. Bell Junior Middle Sports and Wellness Academy to encourage all students and staff to be more active every day. Here are a few

examples of how we can be more active: try out for a sports team; take the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator; or walk, ride a bike, or scoot to school.

Every day, we are given a new and different way to make our day harder. Students are more active at lunch, and love to join in games of soccer, football, or just moving around. We are even encouraged to walk around listening to our music instead of standing against the wall - simple things that all of us can do.

The "Let's Make our Day Harder" theme has had a positive effect on the students and staff at JSB who aren't always active and has even had a positive impact on those that already were. Join us in making your day harder too!! (By: Caelest & Bronwyn - Grade 8 Students at James S. Bell Junior Middle Sports and Wellness Academy)

Room of Refuge...the Calming Effects of Physical Activity

Bliss Carmen Jr PS has a long and proud tradition of excellence in athletic pursuits and extra-curricular opportunities. However, an increasing number of our student population is coping with anxiety, depression, and varying forms of self-harm. Not to be alarmist, thorough assessments by mental health professionals and psychiatrist identify these concerns of wellness early in the journey of these young peoples' lives dealing with various forms of trauma. Whether they be from accidents, financial troubles, transitioning to a new country or challenges within the family, many of these events elicit stress and tension in our youth.

To support students and their families we have in place counselling interventions, family and individual therapy, programs (too many to mention) and medication at times. But at Bliss, we have decided to tackle this emerging challenge with PHYSICAL ACTIVITY!!

We have invested in the Room of Refuge, a space constructed to support the physical and mental well-being of our students through Yoga, light activity, moderate levels of movement to music and creating a space where one does not need to be an elite athlete to participate or enjoy the company of others. As one student articulates, "I try to take my medication between 7:30 & 8 but it doesn't kick in by the time I get to school...so the room helps me burn extra energy...that keeps me out of trouble."

This space has been developed to allow for gendered participation, mixed ability groupings and general sharing through various forms of activity. The feedback from our students and success of this space has forced us to expand it to a weekly component of all HPE classes. Research cites, if you are tired, exercise tends to give you energy. If you are worried, it can take your mind off your concerns for a while. Even if you can't exercise, 15 minutes of activity can help you to clear your mind and relax. (Landers and Arent, 2007, in Exercise & Health Psychology. 3rd Ed. Chap 21)

(By: Kurt McIntosh, Principal, Bliss Carmen Junior Public School)

Holiday Wellness Tips

It's the most wonderful time of the year! December, a time when there is much excitement and rushing around. The media portrays families and friends getting together, gifts galore being advertised, travel plans for winter break and opportunities to reach out and help others in the community. This year especially, with so many refugees about to arrive in Canada there is a true sense of giving to others. No matter what our traditions or backgrounds, it is a time to celebrate peace, love and joy.

So, why are so many feeling stressed and tired? What can we do to make us feel it truly is the most wonderful time of the year? Physical activity battles fatigue and stress and releases emotions and puts energy into your body!

Give yourself a break. Do things you like and want to do. Plan unstructured, low cost, fun holiday activities. Walk around your neighbourhood admiring the outdoor decorations, go window shopping, skate at your local outdoor rink.

Release your stress. Go into your room, stomp your feet, throw marshmallows at the wall, break some balloons! Put on your favourite music and dance around your living room singing loudly!

Flex your routines but keep them. Don't skip your regular workouts but feel free to modify them. Try skipping at home, swimming at the local pool, participating in online exercise programs.

Share the workload. Ask others for help. Even cleaning can be fun if family members join in. Bake together. Decorate your home together.

Enjoy the outdoors. Walk in the park, go skiing, visit the zoo, make snow angels, or organize a neighbourhood road hockey game. Be creative, build a bird feeder and hang it.

Volunteer. Help at a Food Bank, serve meals to the hungry at one of the Out of the Cold programs, deliver Holiday gift baskets, go caroling to spread cheer.

Be active as a family. Be a kid! Bring out games you enjoyed when you were young and share them with your children. Go tobogganing. Put a large jigsaw puzzle together.

Watch the sugary gooey treats. Eat healthy most of the time! Enjoy those special treats for what they are, special and a treat! Enjoy every morsel without guilt but exercise good judgment and eat in moderation.

Plan a winter break adventure. Whether it is a 10 day cruise, an overnight at a hotel downtown or a trip to the cottage for a few days, do something at another location. A change of scene works wonders.

Care for others. Take time to look around and reach out to family members and friends who may be feeling alone and lonely. The anguish of broken relationships, the loss of a family member or friend, the weariness of illness, isolation can make some feel very alone in the midst all the celebrations. A five minute call, a small gift, an invitation to join you for a tea can mean an awful lot.

Take a deep breath. Give yourself a time out even for a few minutes. Take a few deep breaths, think pleasant relaxing thoughts, wiggle your fingers and toes and then return to reality.

Smile, laugh, stop stressing. A sense of humour can make the most stressful situation more bearable. Don't stress about the dust bunny hiding under the couch, the dirty clothes not put in the hamper, the 10 things on your list not done. ENJOY, it is the winter break, relax and have fun.

REMEMBER, it is a wonderful time of the year! (By: Marcia Powers-Dunlop, Senior Manager – Professional Support Services)

*Wishing you and yours peace, happiness and joy for
the holiday season*

Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team

Heather Johnson & Saleem Haniff, Social Workers, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support

Rose D'Alimonte – Chief of Social Work/Attendance – Area D

Marcia Powers-Dunlop, Interim Senior Manager – Professional Support Services

Sandy Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent – Student Support Services and Care

Leslie Fox, Executive Assistant – Student Support Services and Care