

Addressing teacher mental health begins in schools

by Sam Hammond, CTF/FCE President

COVID-19, lockdowns, and emergency remote teaching and learning wreaked havoc on the public education community. In the pandemic's wake, we have been left with a mental health crisis that has taken an enormous toll, threatening not only the lives and careers of teachers and educators, but Canada's own publicly funded public education systems as well.

By the end of 2020, our research found that two-thirds of teachers had concerns about their mental health and well-being. A follow-up survey months later revealed that teachers and educators were experiencing long-term anxiety, stress, and depression due to increased expectations from work and the blurred realities of work and home life. But the pandemic didn't create the teacher mental health crisis, it made it worse and made it public for all to see. Now we must work to address it.

Now, with the financial support of the federal government, and specifically the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) has launched a pilot project focused on improving the mental health of teachers and education workers.

By working with mental health experts, including our partners at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine, we hope to focus on topics ranging from trauma, resilience, compassion fatigue,



psychological safety, and well-being, to name but a few. Once we begin, mental health experts will lead monthly online sessions with teachers and education workers to guide them to dive deeper on the specific areas.

This pilot program is unique because it's being tailored to the needs and day-to-day realities of teachers and education workers. Also, the last thing teachers need is another task added to their long lists, which is why the program will be structured within their workday. It's based on the collegial model, so it's familiar and proven to be effective.

By the completion of the pilot project, the CTF/FCE hopes to understand more about how programming for whole-school mental illness prevention and mental health promotion can support educators in post-pandemic recovery and beyond.

With the collaboration of CTF/FCE Member Organizations, we have selected three K-12 schools in three jurisdictions that represent the vast diversity of schools and communities across Canada. They include English and French speaking populations, urban and rural settings, elementary and secondary schools, as well as small and large student and teacher populations.

This project, which is set to run from September 2023 to February 2024, is a step in the right direction to ensure teachers and educators have the necessary tools to address mental illness and trauma through the next phases of pandemic recovery.



About the Canadian Teachers' Federation: Founded in 1920, the CTF/FCE is a national alliance of provincial and territorial teachers' organizations that represent over 365,000 teachers and education workers across Canada. The CTF/FCE is also an affiliate of Education International, which represents more than 32-million educators.