

Partnership in Action at Vancouver Technical School

A comprehensive and collaborative approach to student wellness

Each month, we highlight a story from the Healthy Schools BC Stories Map. Click [here](#) to view the map and read more stories. Have a healthy school story to share? DASH wants to hear from you!

Vancouver Technical Secondary School has been taking a comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing social-emotional health issues in their school. After Public Health Nurse (PHN) Derek Roelofsen, school Vice Principal Leann Buteau, and the school guidance counselors noticed an increase in the number of students experiencing issues such as depression and anxiety, they knew they needed to take a more holistic approach to addressing these issues. They wanted to be proactive rather than reactive in their efforts, and to take a collaborative, holistic and comprehensive approach to their efforts.

When asked what her initial thoughts were going into this project, Leann expresses, “I was thrilled we were actually discussing the issue of mental health in our school. As Vice Principal, I hear about these issues more as a result of behavioural manifestations – that kids aren’t attending school, are skipping tests or classes etc. When we put our heads together, we thought about what the kids were telling us loud and clear: they’re feeling overwhelmed, overworked, and we need to address those underlying issues.”

As the project has developed, a number of collaborative partnerships between health, education, and community groups have begun to take shape. The school has formed a multidisciplinary steering committee, composed of a PHN (Derek), administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, representatives from the Community Schools Team, and the SACY* Teen Engagement Program, to address the issue. As part of their plan for the coming year, the committee hopes to actively involve student representatives to support student engagement in the project. Additionally, the school is working with the University of British Columbia (UBC) to support the development of assessment tools, research and analysis. “Right now, UBC is coming into the school on a regular basis and interviewing students about their feelings around school connectedness. They will be using that information to build the assessment tools. Starting in January, we will begin analyzing the data and then by the end of the school year, we will have developed a plan to really be off and running when we start in September,” Leann explains.

When asked why taking a holistic approach to addressing social-emotional wellness is so important, Derek explained, “We wanted to decrease some of the root causes of the anxiety and depression we were seeing in the students.” To move forward with their vision, the committee has been utilizing the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) Framework as a foundational guide for their assessment and planning actions. The CSH approach has helped the committee to identify areas of strength, potential gaps, and opportunities for improving social-emotional wellbeing in the school environment. Resources such as the [CSH Knowledge Guide](#) and the [CSH Four Pillar Activity](#) have been a great support to the committee and their partners as they build the project assessment and plan. “Ultimately, our goal is to have a very healthy school community, and school connectedness will be one of the measures of that goal,” says Leann.

Stay tuned for more developments on this exciting project in a future edition of the Healthy Schools Newsletter, and click on the link to see their story on the [Healthy Schools BC Stories Map](#).

For more information about this story, please [email Jen Brennen](#) at DASH.

*School Aged Children and Youth (SACY)