

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

### **Whole School Approach**

#### **Part 1. Using a model of resilience to create healthy school communities**

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*Using a whole school approach to create a welcoming, caring, safe and respectful learning environment promotes resiliency and leads to healthier, positive outcomes for students.*

#### **Key understandings:**

- A whole school approach is a multi-faceted approach that can be compared to a strong dam built of many individual sandbags. The sandbags represent different aspects that contribute to the overall strength of an approach such as a resiliency framework, peer mentoring, and opportunities for students to be heard.
- Knowledge alone is not enough to create behaviour change. Effective whole school approaches must consider the social determinants of health and the kinds of strategies and experiences which will help students overcome these determinants.
- Poverty is one of the key social issues that affect student health and school success.
  - For example, obesity, a major health issue for many school-aged children, is a disease of poverty; rates of obesity and diabetes increase as income decreases (and are rising more rapidly in households with lower incomes).
  - There are also direct links between poverty and school readiness and high school completion. Students living in poverty are less likely to be ready to enter school and less likely to complete high school.
- Health and education issues are more acute in Indigenous cultures in Canada due to transgenerational stress. This includes the legacy of residential schools, loss of language, loss of culture and loss of land. Addressing these issues is essential in creating a whole school approach to improve outcomes for Indigenous youth.
- Using a whole school approach to support resiliency improves health and wellness.
- Supporting resilience means helping students develop skills and attitudes that will help buffer them against negative outcomes and overcome social determinants such as poverty.
- A student who is resilient demonstrates a number of positive characteristics, including:
  - a sense of belonging to a community
  - a sense of mastery of a skill
  - a sense of self-regulation and independence.

## Using a model of resilience to create healthy school communities (cont.)

### Key understandings (cont.)

- The Circle of Courage philosophy (developed by Bendro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern) is a model of youth empowerment rooted in Indigenous culture that can provide a pathway to wellness. The model has four major elements:
  - belonging (a need to feel valued and important)
  - mastery (developing competence)
  - independence (responsibility for oneself)
  - generosity (genuine desire to help others).
- Peer mentoring programs in a number of Manitoba schools, using resilience and the circles of courage model, are leading to improved self-esteem, decreased obesity, and increased high school completion rates for Aboriginal youth.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What does resiliency mean to you? How does it affect the day-to-day life of students in your school community?
- What strategies is your school or authority using to create a sense of belonging for all students? What evidence are schools using to track their progress?
- What opportunities do you have at your school for students to experience mastery? How can those opportunities be expanded?, Is helping students develop self-regulation and skills for independence a priority in your school or district? Why or why not?
- How does your school promote a spirit of generosity and create authentic opportunities for all students to contribute? How could these opportunities be expanded?
- How culturally responsive are your practices?

### For more information:

- on the [whole school approach](#)
- on [peer mentoring](#)
- on [resilience](#), including this [Harvard University working paper](#).