

# YOU(TH) MATTER IN AMDSB: LEADING & LEARNING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (MHWB)



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"Student teams came together from across our School District for a MHWB symposium. The symposium was planned by student leads, alongside adult team members. The students learned more about MHWB, and created plans for their schools which they will implement. Hearing from the students is what matters. They have such enthusiasm, want to learn, support each other, and have endless creative ideas. YOU MATTER is making such a difference in transforming mental health here at Avon Maitland District School Board!"

-Laura Marotta, Superintendent of Education,  
Avon Maitland District School Board &  
-Dr. Anne Robinson, Mental Health Lead,  
Avon Maitland District School Board

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"The YOU MATTER initiative has been meaningful and impactful for the students of the AMDSB. YOU MATTER has provided an opportunity for students to come together to learn more about MHWB and to create individualized school initiatives in support of mental wellness. It has also allowed students to have their voices heard. When many students feel isolated and alone, the initiative has introduced understanding, acceptance, and support to students."

-AMDSB Student Leader

# PART 1: OVERVIEW OF YOU MATTER

There is an increasing focus on supporting the MHWB of youth. Research shows that 70% of mental health problems onset in childhood or adolescence and that young people aged 15-24 are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance use issues than any other age group. Although 20% of Canadians will develop a mental health issue by age 25, we can make a difference in supporting students who are struggling and those who are experiencing MHWB issues. There is a growing body of evidence about the importance of promotion, prevention, and early interventions related to youth MHWB.

One approach to MHWB in AMDSB is to involve youth in programming. Youth-led programming creates opportunities for the community and young people to collaborate and when youth are provided with the appropriate tools, they can create lasting change for themselves and their communities.

YOU MATTER is a collaborative, youth-focused, community-involved MHWB initiative created by Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB), in partnership with community agency Rural Response for Healthy Children. YOU MATTER is also supported by the Trillium Foundation and the Tanner Steffler Foundation. YOU MATTER empowers youth leaders to support MHWB by developing, leading, implementing, and monitoring MHWB initiatives in their schools. YOU MATTER is designed to remind everyone that “we all have mental health” and that there is a continuum of health and well-being which changes over time and in response to situations.

The core components of YOU MATTER are:

1. An annual YOU MATTER symposium, at which students learn about MHWB and leadership, and monitor the improvement of student wellness in resilience and self-regulation.
2. MHWB initiatives at schools, which are planned, implemented, and monitored by AMDSB school teams
3. Ongoing collaboration with community partners.

The YOU MATTER inquiry asks:

**“How do student-designed and student-implemented MHWB initiatives support students in schools?”**

## References

1. *Youth mental health reality: The difference we can make.* Youth Mental Health Canada. Retrieved February 23, 2021, from <https://ymhc.ngo/resources/ymh-stats/#:-:text=An%20estimated%201.2%20million%20children,have%20developed%20a%20mental%20illness>
2. Youth in Focus (2002). *Youth REP step by step: An introduction to youth-led research and evaluation.* Oakland CA: Youth in Focus.



# A LOOK AT THE YOU MATTER 1 SYMPOSIUM 2019

YOU MATTER 1, the first annual symposium, took place in November 2019. It was planned by adults for AMDSB youth Grades 7-12. The event energized students by sharing MHWB resources and preparing students and staff to lead MHWB initiatives in their schools.

At the YOU MATTER 1 symposium, participants shared their perspectives on MHWB, learned from guest speakers, and connected with community support agencies. Each school formed a team consisting of students and supportive adults. Working in school teams, they considered MHWB needs and initiative options and began to plan ideas for their school.





Participants at the YOU MATTER 1 symposium shared a desire to continue engaging in conversations about MHWB in their schools. They were keen to learn about strategies and resources to support themselves and their peers who may be struggling with MHWB. Following the symposium, an evening event was held for the community. Approximately 30 community partners and 50 participants attended the presentation.

Following YOU MATTER 1, teams of students and staff from AMDSB schools started planning MHWB initiatives with their schools. With support from Rural Response, 23 schools submitted plans and began implementing and monitoring their initiatives. A webinar was hosted and website developed to support school based monitoring and reporting about the influence of initiatives.

School-planned initiatives were taking place in 70% of the schools in spring of 2020. Early indicator data from school teams shows 7,514 students were reached. In March 2020, schools closed and initiatives were halted due to the uncertainties in the early stages of Covid-19. During the Covid-19 crisis, AMDSB and Rural Response responded quickly to support students. They connected with students through telephone, mailings, driveway check-ins, virtual chats and social media.

## "YOU MATTER" AMDSB INITIATIVE

2019-2020 Timeline

<p><b>PLAN</b></p> <p><b>OCTOBER 2019</b></p> <p>Collaborative development of materials and planning of the YOU MATTER Mental Health Symposium</p> <p><b>DECEMBER 2019</b></p> <p>School teams begin to work on MHWB school plans, consolidating big ideas from the symposium, inputting and analyzing data</p>	<p><b>SEPTEMBER 2019</b></p> <p>Co-creation of Project Plan between AMDSB, Rural Response and the Research Team, Establishing the project team</p> <p><b>NOVEMBER 2019</b></p> <p>YOU MATTER Mental Health Symposium held on November 26th</p> <p><b>JANUARY 2020</b></p> <p>Reporting key symposium ideas to project team, receiving and reviewing school MHWB plans, planning for school visits to check in</p>
<p><b>ACT</b></p> <p><b>FEBRUARY 2020</b></p> <p>Creation of YOU MATTER Infographic to motivate students, AMDSB and Rural Response visits to schools</p>  <p>YOU MATTER INFOGRAPHIC</p>	<p><b>MARCH 2020</b></p> <p>Hosting a Webinar to meet with School Teams, completing MHWB focused literature reviews</p>  <p>STUDENTS AS LEADERS WEBSITE</p> 
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p> <p><b>MAY/JUNE 2020</b></p> <p>Project team remote reflection and planning sessions via Zoom</p>	<p><b>APRIL 2020</b></p> <p>Development of future Symposium materials, reviewing all literature reviews and planning focus group for May 2020</p>  <p>#iamwell</p>



**STUDENTS AS LEADERS: SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN AMDSB**

**"YOU MATTER!" INTERIM REPORT JUNE 2020**

Report Outline

1. Project Context 2019-2020
2. Connecting "You Matter!" to Relevant Research
3. "You Matter!" 2019-2020 Timeline
4. Symposium Findings at a Glance
5. Learning From School Plan Analysis
6. "You Matter!" Project Discoveries to Date
7. Looking to the Future
8. Proposed Plan for 2020-2021

Report prepared by Dr. Michelle Searle and Dr. Lori Kirkpatrick with Research Assistance from Rachael Smyth, Katrina Carbone, Christina Julia Kourmouzidou, Rebecca Evans, Jayda Corni & Braden Cornfield



**Students as Leaders: A Day Spent Supporting Mental Health and Well-Being in AMDSB**

Report Prepared by Dr. Michelle Searle & Dr. Lori Kirkpatrick with Research Assistance from Rachael Smyth, Christina Kourmouzidou, Katrina Carbone, Rebecca Corni & Jayda Corni

January 2020

Take a look at the Research Rocks Website here!



# A LOOK AT THE YOU MATTER 2 SYMPOSIUM 2021

The YOU MATTER 2 symposium, held virtually in January 2021, was planned by AMDSB students alongside adult team members. The goal of this event was time to monitor MHWB in the schools and continue to plan MHWB initiatives. YOU MATTER 2 seeks to foster an increased sense of belonging within schools, throughout AMDSB, and across the broader community, particularly during Covid-19 and school disruptions.

YOU MATTER 2 expanded on the initial involvement of students and integrated their role across the scope of the inquiry to further embed student leadership. Youth leaders were crucial in the planning, hosting, and analysis of the YOU MATTER 2 event. Student leader participation in a 'data party' provided valuable insight into students' priorities and needs expressed in this report. These valued student leader roles are ongoing.

Planning a district-wide event for participants ranging from Grade 6 to 12 plus adult supporters is immense and was amplified due to the need to host YOU MATTER 2 entirely virtually during a pandemic. The multiple logistics were spearheaded by Superintendent Jodie Baker and the student planning team in partnership with community collaborators from Rural Response and the research team.

The YOU MATTER 2 Symposium was hosted by Faux Pop, in a large-scale Zoom platform. Participants had access to multiple features to support them in interacting, asking questions about MHWB, and engaging during activities. We used multiple forms of media and break-out rooms for school planning. Data was collected using Poll Everywhere, the Zoom chat, and Qualtrics survey software. The symposium was lively!

More than 250 students from Grades 6-12 and approximately 80 adults from across 41 AMDSB schools joined together to learn about and plan for supporting MHWB. Students shared their perspectives on MHWB, asked questions, heard from guest speakers about MHWB and leadership before meeting with their school teams to start planning initiatives for their schools.

Three dignitaries, the Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, and MPPs Randy Pettapiece and Minister Lisa Thompson joined YOU MATTER 2 to hear more about the MHWB learning and support for students in AMDSB. The event was also covered in the news media and on social media platforms (see images).

# 280

YOU MATTER 2 Participants

*Data are reported as percentages. While there were at least 280 participants at the symposium, not all were able to sustain connectivity or responded to all questions.*



## A. STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

At the outset of the symposium, students were asked what they wanted to know about MHWB. Students identified six big ideas: **Coping Techniques**, **School Plans**, **Supporting Others**, **MHWB Education**, **Resources**, and **Stigma Reduction** (see side images).

Participants hoped to learn about **coping techniques** to manage their emotions, how they could better their learning environments, and ways to integrate mental health supports during virtual learning. Students wanted **coping techniques** to manage their own mental health. For example, they "hoped to learn about meditation and how to relax when stressed".

Students wanted to know what types of MHWB activities other AMDSB schools had implemented within their **school plans**. A participant asked, "Is there a resource of planned activities somewhere as an archive? It would be nice to share some things ... [to] have an idea of some options...". The inquiry team responded to this request by sharing planning ideas. We are also creating central YOU MATTER resources and investigating the role social media can play.

**Supporting others** who might be struggling, outwardly or silently, with MHWB was a concern. One participant stated, "My one question is, how can we make sure that our communities and people around us have good mental health? And if they don't, what can we do for them?". This caring and community-oriented attitude is a goal of YOU MATTER.

Stories have power and students want more of them. One student said, "I hope I gain a better understanding of what mental health really is". Through this inquiry, we will offer **MHWB education** or insight into what MHWB truly is while sharing stories of challenges and successes within AMDSB.

Another big idea revealed the desire to not simply know but to understand who and how to access **resources** within the community. Students hoped to learn "how to reach out for support".

Finally, students want to raise awareness and **reduce stigma**. One participant questioned "how to respond to those that still fall under the old ways of thinking around mental health". **Stigma reduction** is a central aim as the process of YOU MATTER continues.



*"How I can make a difference in my community to make people understand mental health and how we can take care of ourselves! I think it is very important that everyone in our school knows its okay to not be okay."*  
-AMDSB Student



25%

**Coping Techniques**

*"I'm most excited to see the results and impact the projects have on the school."*  
-AMDSB Student



23%

**School Plans**

*"I just want to learn more in depth about mental health and learn strategies to cope and how to help people struggling."*  
-AMDSB Student



23%

**Supporting Others**

*"How to make kids feel more comfortable about opening up, and how to encourage students to be more open-minded and accepting to the issues of others."*  
-AMDSB Student



21%

**MHWB Education**



4%

**Resources**



4%

**Stigma Reduction**

## B. STUDENT LEADERSHIP

The transition from adult-led programming to student-led programming is visible in the way that students felt engaged and empowered to take leadership roles in MHWB initiatives. YOU MATTER 2 was entirely developed with support from student leaders, including a few who co-facilitated on the day of the event. Student leaders continue as part of the collaborative inquiry team and are critical to gathering and hearing youth voice.

Almost 80% of YOU MATTER 2 participants identified feeling empowered to make a difference with MHWB in their classrooms and schools. The chat and informal feedback demonstrated that students felt compelled to take action and confident engaging in school team leadership roles to promote MHWB. Students have asked for specific information about:

- Supporting friends and family with their MHWB
- Talking about MHWB with peers
- Decreasing the stigma
- Recognizing when their peers need support

*"I hope to head back to school with the tools and support and knowledge I need to create change for my peers".*  
-AMDSB Student

*"Kids are happy, love themselves and are honest to themselves. Teachers are listening to students and helping them with what they need. There are no put down words and everybody is being kind to one another. Everybody has at least 1 thing they like in the class which helps them improve their learning. We are all listening and helping each other."*  
-AMDSB Student

*"We are mental flossing every day together mental health is being talked about, people are reaching out and people are happy and positive."*  
-AMDSB Student

During the symposium, we were joined by "Mindful Mike" Masse, a mindfulness consultant and public speaker.

Mike helped students self-assess their own well-being and helped provide techniques that can help students in future. Mindful Mike asked important questions during the self-assessment portion, such as

- "How do you feel today on a scale from 1-5?"
- "Where do you feel stress?"
- "What makes you feel nervous?"

Students used the chat feature to provide answers during the activity. A synopsis of their answers can be seen in the poster to the right. The handout on the right summarizes the data and was provided to the students to remind them of the strategies they learned and as an artifact which they could share with their school communities.

### MINDFUL MIKE @ YOU MATTER 2 WHAT DID WE LEARN?

"Mindful Mike" Masse joined us to discuss different mindfulness techniques and guided us to self-assess our own well-being. Mindful Mike asked students these questions, and this is what we learned!

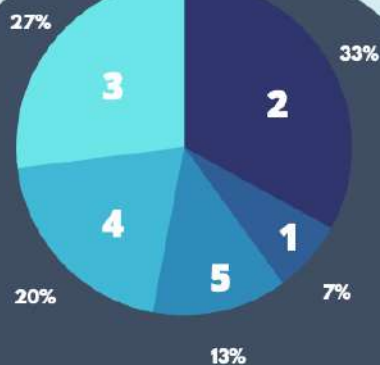
**WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL NERVOUS?**

COVID-19, Virtual Learning, Sports Games, Driving, Tests, sometimes we are nervous about nothing specific at all

**WHERE DO YOU FEEL STRESS?**

In our stomachs, chest, head, legs, and even all over!

**HOW DO YOU FEEL TODAY ON A SCALE OF 1-5?**



Check out Mindful Mike!  
mindfulmike.ca  
@mindfulmasse

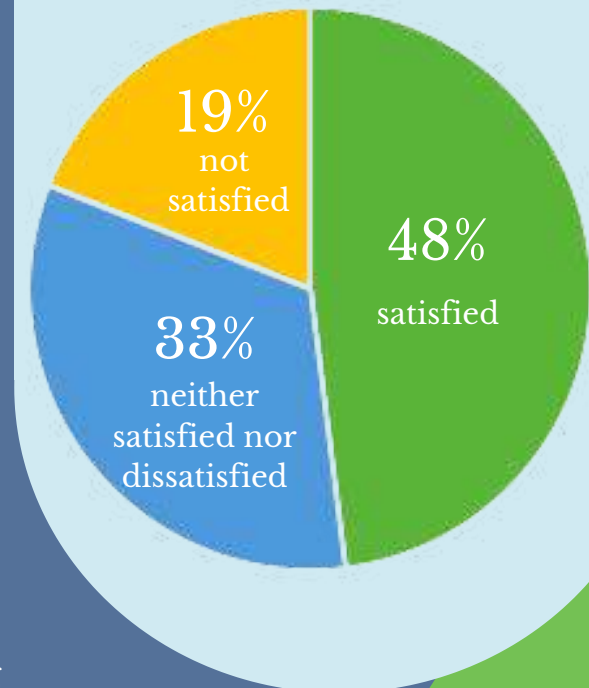
You Matter To Us!  
#IAMwell AMDSB



## C. INITIATIVES AT SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES, SATISFACTION, FEELINGS

When asked about the challenges students face when seeking MHWB supports, five themes emerged: **Stigma**, **Fear of Embarrassment**, **Accessibility**, **Lack of Privacy**, and **Technology Issues**. **Stigma** included feeling shamed by their family members and society as well as feeling judged by peers. **Fear of embarrassment** differed from **stigma**; participants shared the individualized challenges they face or worries they have. Responses revealed worry about a teacher or counsellor singling them out in front of their peers to fear of being ridiculed. **Accessibility** is a main challenge that students face when requiring supports. Due to the virtual context, many participants mentioned challenges when accessing supports virtually and not knowing who to contact in the school/community. **Accessibility** concerns were also related to financial strain as well as not having peers or friends readily available. **Lack of privacy** was another theme identified as a challenge when accessing resources confidentially. Respondents highlighted not having a private phone, as well as lack of space in their homes as barriers they face. Finally, respondents identified **Technology Issues** as being a challenge they face when seeking MHWB supports. Responses highlighted inconsistent internet and shared devices with other members of the home being a constraint.

Students were asked about their satisfaction with MHWB activities in their schools and classes. Here is how they felt!



*"One challenge might be if kids are not willing to help themselves with the resources we will provide, or if they feel embarrassed to use those resources because of what others might think, so we must work as a team to make them feel important, and proud to use the resources to help their MHWB."*  
-AMDSB Student

Students felt excited to begin the symposium. They identified feeling nervous about discussing topics related to mental health in a large group. At first, the chat in Zoom revealed fears students were experiencing. Despite this nervousness, they were enthusiastic about what they would be learning about at the symposium and about planning their initiatives at school.

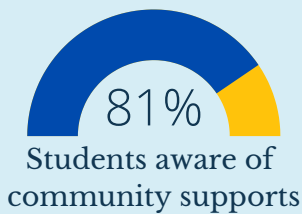
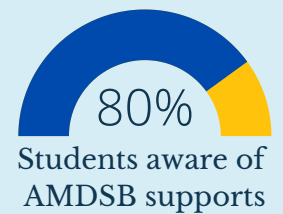
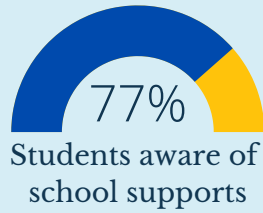
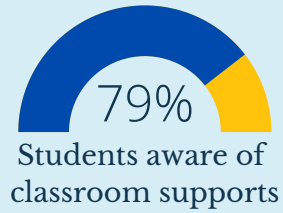
*"I'm most excited to see the results and impact the projects have on the school."*  
-AMDSB Student



The tree graphic portrays words participants used to describe their feelings part way through the symposium.

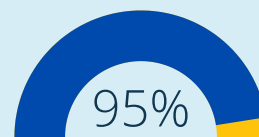
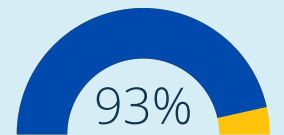
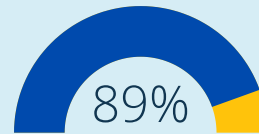
## D. THOUGHTS AFTER YOU MATTER 2

At the end of the symposium, 191 participants completed a survey. Results from the survey highlighted a strong awareness of MHWB supports in their classrooms, in their schools, through AMDSB, in their community, and online or by phone. Compared to participants' awareness of MHWB supports in classrooms and schools at the start of the symposium, more students strongly agree and agree that they are aware of supports in their classrooms, schools, and the community.



*"Mental health is touched on weekly and students are aware of it. Students are treating one another with empathy and accepting differences. Positive self-talk and growth mindsets are seen in the classroom. Students and staff are not afraid to admit their struggles with mental health. Mindfulness is implemented into classroom activities. The curriculum focuses on collaboration."*  
-AMDSB Student

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that they were eager to implement MHWB initiatives in their classrooms and schools. A student described "I already feel super motivated and excited to start working". Overall data showed participants were prepared, motivated, engaged, and willing to plan and support MHWB activities in their schools. Participants described feeling supported in creating MHWB activities by educators and administrators. Participants noted the influence that they can have in championing MHWB and positively influencing others.



## E. VIRTUAL CONTEXT

While participants felt positive about their role in bringing MHWB supports into their classes and schools, they were concerned about the influence of engaging in MHWB initiatives virtually. Symposium attendees are thinking creatively about how to handle challenges and remain focused on the overall goal of supporting youth MHWB at their schools.

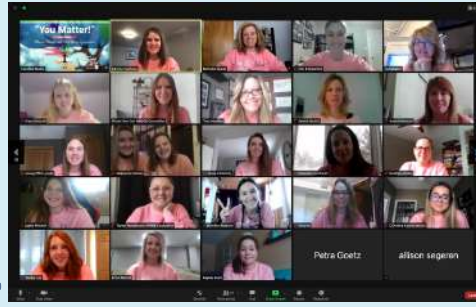
*"The pandemic and not being face-to-face and having to physically distance - no hugging, no cross the line type activity is possible right now. We have to learn to utilize technology better so that we can reach out to everyone despite the distance."*  
-AMDSB Student

*"A challenge that could impact our activity is COVID-19 and the guidelines around it. We can overcome the challenge by making sure our activity is safe for everyone and still works with guidelines."*  
-AMDSB Student



# PART 3: ONGOING SUPPORT FOR MHWB

People pictured in the image are some of the many supports to student MHWB in AMDSB. Many additional resources are featured on this page. There are videos, websites, tools and community partners to support MHWB!



**"You Matter!"<sup>2</sup>**  
VIRTUAL  
Mental Health and Well-Being Symposium

**HURON PERTH MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS SUPPORTS**  
January 19, 2021

- Avon Mallard District School Board Mental Health Team
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Choices for Change
- Emily Maugh Centre and Second Stage Housing
- Huron Hospice
- Huron Perth Centre for Children and Youth
- Huron Perth Helpline and Crisis Response Team
- Huron Perth Public Health
- Huron Safe Homes for Youth
- Huron Women's Shelter
- Local Health Integration Network
- Ontario Provincial Police
- Sheffield Police
- Optimism Place
- Rural Response for Healthy Children
- South Huron Hospital Association- Social Work
- Stafford/Perth Shelter Link
- Victim Services of Huron County

**Perth County Family Health Teams**

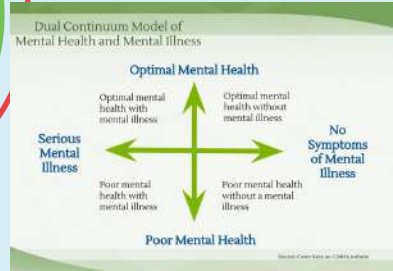
- Happy Valley Family Health Team (St Marys)
- North Perth Family Health Team (Liswell)
- Star Family Health Team
- Stratford Family Health Team

**Huron County Family Health Teams**

- Blenheim Area Family Health Team (St Marys)
- Clinton Family Health Team
- Grand Bend Area Community Health Centre
- Huron County Community Health Team (Sawford) - including My Journey Program (Health System Navigator)
- Mustard Valley Family Health Team (Goderich)
- North Huron Family Health Team (Wingham)

#1211well  
Avon Mallard District School Board

Scan the QR code to get to the AMDSB MHWB YOU MATTER Resources



"Sometimes I feel overwhelmed and I need resources to cope"  
-AMDSB Student

"AMDSB plays an important role in supporting mental health and wellness for our students. At our Board we promote mental well-being through everyday mental health practices, build student socio-emotional learning skills, and have various prevention supports for students at risk. We offer mental health and addictions professional development, try and identify students struggling with mental health issues, and refer students in need to our internal support staff and/or to our community mental health service partners."  
-Dr. Anne Robinson,  
AMDSB Mental Health Lead

"I like that kid's MHWB is being recognized even if those kids don't realize they could use some help or support with their MHWB. That will make them feel like they matter and they are important."  
-AMDSB Student



Take a look at Mindful Mike here!  
mindfulmike.ca



Some videos about promoting mental health!



# PART 4: LOOKING AHEAD

The YOU MATTER inquiry is premised on the values of promotion, prevention and early intervention as key to MHWB. YOU MATTER is on a trajectory from raising awareness with adult support to setting the context towards a shared goal related to student-designed and student-implemented MHWB initiatives supporting students in schools. YOU MATTER is designed to strengthen community in all aspects of the word – community within schools who participate; across the district and in relationship with local leaders, foundations and partners who support MHWB in diverse and essential ways.

As a significant AMDSB initiative, YOU MATTER is supported by community and research that prioritizes leadership and engagement of youth to foster a sense of belonging in support of MHWB. Students are excited to take on new roles that promote knowledge and reduce stigma associated with MHWB. Over the past two years, we have heard how youth want to know more, reach out to one another, and create change in their school and community.



## KEY DISCOVERIES FROM YOU MATTER 2021

During the remainder of this school year the YOU MATTER team will:

- Appreciate the effects of the pandemic on youth MHWB and the context of schooling
- Acknowledge the challenges with MHWB program innovation given the instability caused by the pandemic
- Recognize that YOU MATTER program planning with youth is a dynamic process
- Provide support for emerging ideas and involvement of youth leaders in YOU MATTER
- Engage in responsive planning with school teams to plan to support MHWB initiatives
- Develop support and awareness for YOU MATTER with students, school & district leaders
- Leverage evidence-informed resources and tools to support ongoing youth MHWB
- Create virtual mechanisms to encourage school-school and across-district exchanges of ideas (e.g. a student-led social media presence, shared online student space)
- Amplify the YOU MATTER messaging to reach across AMDSB and into the community
- Establish clear pathways and contacts for youth to access community supports
- Involve community and adult learning opportunities into YOU MATTER initiatives
- Adapt YOU MATTER experiences in light of ongoing health and safety priorities, including continuous improvement with online tools and modes of engaging



## BEYOND JUNE 2021...

Early ideas from participants at YOU MATTER 2021 offer valuable insights; the YOU MATTER inquiry team will consider:

- Co-constructing a shared vision for the future YOU MATTER initiative involving additional youth, district and community leaders
- Investigating the sustainability of the YOU MATTER initiative in AMDSB (aligning with curriculum goals/student leadership classes; increased involvement of community partners; additional supports and sources of funding)
- Examining AMDSB contributions to the scalability of the YOU MATTER initiative at other school districts in Ontario