

DISABILITY BENEFITS PLAN

Psychological Health and Safety Project

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Introduction

Over the past several years, the Disability Benefits Plan (DBP) has seen an increase in mental health related claims connected to the workplace. A closer review showed that many of these claims were linked to interpersonal conflict at the school or divisional level. In response, and as an extension of our Early Intervention Program, the DBP launched a psychological health and safety pilot project in September 2023 with the Lord Selkirk School Division. The goal was simple: explore whether earlier, workplace-focused support could help prevent issues from escalating into sick leave or disability claims.

The project included workshops, administration of the Guarding Minds at Work Survey, analysis of the survey results, focus groups, school visits, intensive support for school leadership, and the development of action plans.

Building on this work, DBP has since extended its outreach to the Louis Riel School Division to apply the learning from the past two years and to explore how to scale supports to others across the province.

This report outlines what we've learned over the past two and a half years and provides recommendations to better support Members in their workplaces.



Acknowledgements

The Disability Benefits Plan (“DBP”) wishes to express our sincere thanks to the Lord Selkirk School Division for working with us on this pilot project. Throughout this process, they were open to ideas and were committed to improving the culture and wellbeing of their school division. They allowed us time to meet with their leadership group and to understand the needs of their entire staff. This access and collaboration were pivotal to our learning.

Specific thanks to Jerret Long, Superintendent and Lisa Minaker, Assistant Superintendent, who spent many hours with us reviewing data, considering suggestions and engaging in thoughtful discussion. Their openness, patience and kindness throughout the project were greatly appreciated.

Thank you also to all the Principals, Vice Principals and Directors, who welcomed us into their schools and helped us understand the daily challenges they face. Thank you for the time you gave us with your staff to further explore and understand the Guarding Minds results.

Thank you to Jamie Shuhyta, President of the Lord Selkirk Teachers’ Association for championing the project and for his ongoing communication and support of Members.

We also thank the Louis Riel School Division for contacting the DBP after completing their Guarding Minds survey and for their openness to continued learning and action. Seventeen schools and their leadership teams participated in psychological health and safety professional development, data review, and school-based action planning. Thank you to Jay McGurran, President of the Louis Riel Teachers’ Association, for his support and insight throughout this work.

Finally, we are grateful to our DBP premium paying Members who support our work by investing in prevention and early intervention initiatives.

Our greatest expression of gratitude goes towards the many Members who participated in surveys, focus groups, and conversations, often sharing difficult experiences with honesty and vulnerability. Your willingness to engage in hard conversations, raise concerns, and reflect openly on working conditions was essential to understanding what psychological health and safety truly looks like in Manitoba schools. Thank you for trusting us with your stories.

Definitions

This project was guided by well established research and approaches used to help organizations support mental health and prevent psychological harm at work. The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace served as the starting point for this work.

As the project evolved, additional tools and definitions were used to better reflect the realities of psychological health in Manitoba schools.

The National Standard of Canada¹ for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace

- First of its kind in the world.
- A set of voluntary guidelines, tools, and resources intended to help organizations promote mental health and prevent psychological harm at work.
- Commissioned by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and launched in 2013 and reaffirmed and updated in 2022 to reflect evolving research and best practices.
- Grounded in decades of research and has been widely adopted across Canada and internationally.
- Provides an evidence based framework for identifying psychosocial hazards, assessing organizational risk, and supporting prevention-focused systems change.

Three Pillars of Psychological Health and Safety

The National Standard is commonly understood through three interconnected pillars.

While all three pillars are important, this pilot project focused primarily on the resolution pillar. Many challenges affecting staff wellbeing in schools are not medical in nature, but instead relate to unresolved concerns, interpersonal conflict, working conditions, and leadership practices.



¹ National Standard - Mental Health Commission of Canada

The 13 Factors of Psychological Health and Safety

The National Standard identifies 13 factors that influence whether a workplace supports or harms psychological health. Together, these factors describe the conditions that shape how safe people feel at work, how supported they are, and whether concerns are addressed early or allowed to escalate.

In education settings, these factors are experienced daily through leadership decisions, relationships, workload expectations, and organizational culture. The 13 factors provided an important framework for identifying strengths, areas of concern, and for guiding discussions with school leadership and staff.

1. Organizational Culture

The shared values and norms that guide how people are treated.

School example: Staff feel safe raising concerns and see follow-through, rather than issues being minimized or ignored.

2. Psychological & Social Support

Access to help from leaders and colleagues when struggling.

School example: A principal checks in and offers support after a difficult parent or student incident.

3. Clear Leadership & Expectations

Knowing what is expected and how decisions are made.

School example: Staff receive clear, consistent direction instead of mixed messages or last-minute changes.

4. Civility & Respect

Respectful interactions, even during disagreement or stress.

School example: Concerns are addressed privately and professionally, not through sarcasm or public criticism.

5. Psychological Demands

The emotional and mental demands of the work.

School example: Teachers manage trauma-impacted students and complex behaviours without adequate recovery time.

6. Growth & Development

Opportunities to build skills and confidence.

School example: School leaders receive coaching or mentoring on managing staff wellbeing, not just operations.

7. Recognition & Reward

Feeling valued for effort and contribution.

School example: Daily acknowledgement of staff effort during challenging periods, not just symbolic gestures.

8. Involvement & Influence

Having a voice in decisions that affect work.

School example: Staff are consulted on scheduling or workload changes before decisions are finalized.

9. Workload Management

Work demands are realistic and manageable.

School example: Expectations are adjusted during report cards, shortages, or high-stress periods.

10. Engagement

Feeling connected, motivated, and invested in the work.

School example: Staff contribute ideas and remain involved, rather than withdrawing or disengaging.

11. Balance

Ability to maintain boundaries between work and life.

School example: Respect for limits around after-hours emails and meetings.

12. Psychological Protection

Protection from bullying, harassment, or retaliation.

School example: A teacher can raise concerns without fear of being labeled or punished.

13. Protection of Physical Safety

Physical risks are identified and addressed.

School example: Clear processes and follow-up after violent incidents, especially for EAs and support staff.

Psychological Health & Safety: Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)

The MHCC describes psychological health and safety as the conditions that support wellbeing and protect people from psychological harm at work.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of everyday interactions, language, and behaviours in shaping workplace culture with a focus on:

- Building staff wellbeing and morale
- Valuing people and building relationships
- Patrolling the boundaries of respect
- Redistribute influence and neutralizes hierarchy so people feel like they have a voice

Psychological Safety: Defined by Amy Edmonson, Fearless Organization

As defined by Amy Edmondson, psychological safety refers to a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, meaning people feel able to speak up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation.

This definition helped translate the broader concepts of the National Standard into practical leadership behaviours that could be applied in schools through meetings, conversations, and daily decision-making.

Guarding Minds at Work

Guarding Minds at Work is a free, evidence-based resource developed to support the implementation of the National Standard. It includes a survey tool and summary reporting designed to assess psychological health and safety across the 13 factors.

In this project, the Guarding Minds survey was used as an entry point to understand staff experiences. While the survey provided valuable data, it was not used in isolation. Focus groups and school-level conversations were essential for interpreting the results, understanding context, and identifying practical next steps.

Evolution of the Work

DBP staff undertook certification in the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace “the Standard”. The initial goal was to support School Divisions in implementing a “system-wide” approach to psychological health and safety, consistent with the Standard’s emphasis on policy alignment, leadership commitment, and continuous improvement. Early efforts focused on leadership training, administering Guarding Minds, and identifying gaps across the 13 factors of psychological health and safety.

As the pilot project progressed, several critical learnings emerged that fundamentally shaped the direction of the work.

Practical Solutions are Needed ASAP. While the Standard is an effective high-level framework, its application within school environments proved challenging without significant translation. The Standard often felt abstract to school leaders who were managing immediate, complex, and emotionally charged situations, on a daily basis. School leaders consistently expressed a desire to move beyond identification of risk toward practical solutions, concrete actions, and skill development that could be applied in real time with staff, parents, and students.

Psychological safety is deeply contextual. While divisional policies and structures matter, schools function as distinct micro-environments with their own cultures and relational dynamics. Survey data alone could not capture the lived experience of staff without meaningful dialogue to interpret results in context. Focus groups and school-level conversations revealed that the same psychosocial factor could manifest very differently from one school to another, reinforcing the need for localized, relationship-based interventions.

School leaders play the most pivotal role in shaping psychological health and safety. As they operate as “mini employers” within the education system, with significant influence over workload management, communication, conflict resolution, accommodation practices, and overall school culture. At the same time, these leaders are themselves working within an education system that is inherently high-risk for psychological harm. Leaders struggle with navigating adult mental health concerns, interpersonal conflict, or psychologically unsafe situations without defaulting to medical leave as the primary solution.

As a result of these learnings, the focus of the project evolved. The work shifted toward school leaders and distilling the principles of the Standard into accessible, actionable practices that could be embedded within the daily realities of school environments. Greater emphasis was placed on elements most immediately within the influence of Principals particularly communication, relationship repair, role clarity, conflict navigation, accommodation conversations, and the resolution of concerns before they escalate into disability claims or personnel matters.

Why Lord Selkirk School Division?

The Lord Selkirk School Division (LSSD) contracted Dr. Jennifer Lawson, author of *Teacher Take Care, A Guide to Wellbeing and Workplace Wellness for Educators*, to provide leadership and wellness training to Divisional staff. The professional development included workshops specifically for Principals, recognizing the unique demands of their roles. Shauna Streich, the DBP Case Manager assigned to assist Members in the Lord Selkirk Teachers' Association, was invited to participate and partner in delivering this training during the 2023-2024 school year. Unfortunately, Dr. Lawson was unable to continue the training and therefore DBP was asked to provide the workshops and continue the work.

During the training, DBP approached LSSD about surveying staff using the Guarding Minds tool. Recognizing that solution and action-oriented training require a clear understanding of staff experiences, the Superintendent agreed to assess psychological health and safety across the division and committed to including all staff groups. This was an opportunity the DBP could not pass up and thus began the Psychological Health and Safety Pilot Project.

The DBP's intent was to facilitate the assessment and use this as a learning experience whereby we could evaluate expanding supports within the Early Intervention program. The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace served as a foundational framework for this work.



Background and Purpose

We've noticed a shift in how Members are talking about their mental health, their workplaces and how the two are interconnected.

- Conversations about teacher mental health have increased, with concerns raised at staff and union meetings, through #RealTeacherTalkMB and its current iteration on social media, and at Provincial Council.
- Challenges such as inadequate funding, rising demands, violence, racism, and limited resources have created significant psychosocial risks, making schools inherently high-risk environments for psychological harm.
- While most teachers want solutions and prefer to remain at work, they are increasingly frustrated that responsibility for addressing these issues often falls on them individually.
- Many teachers, particularly younger teachers, expect open dialogue about mental health in the workplace; however, school leaders are often not equipped to have these conversations.
- School leaders strongly influence staff wellbeing through leadership, culture, and relationships, yet administrators face competing demands, budget constraints, and unclear policies.
- Short-term mental health training without follow-up has proven ineffective, leaving teachers feeling unsupported and leaders feeling frustrated.
- Too often, teachers are advised to leave work, medicalizing non-medical issues rooted in working conditions. Research shows that extended time away from work worsens outcomes, increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, and isolation.
- Issues that could be resolved through conversation and accommodation frequently escalate into disability claims, making return-to-work more complex.
- Transfers are a common but imperfect solution, adding workload for administrators and straining relationships; in some cases, teachers leave the division or the profession entirely.

Poor mental health has a significant impact on our members, their families, their workplaces, and the broader community. The toll of mental health challenges on individuals and their employers is well documented and researched in both the Canadian and global context.

- 1 in 5 Canadians struggle with a mental health condition in any given year²; for MTS that equates to 3600 teachers, or the equivalent of all the Members in the Winnipeg and Pembina Trails School Divisions combined, experiencing poor mental health each year.
- About 36% of employees reported that their mental health declined because of work in the past year³ (2024); for MTS that would equate to over 6500 teachers across the province attributing the workplace as a source of psychological harm. It should be noted that this figure would be seen as unacceptable if discussing physical injury created by work.
- In Canada, 30% of disability claims and 70% of all claim costs are due to mental health conditions⁴. The MTS DBP's claim experience is higher than the national program. 50% of our claims are mental health related and conservatively, cost the DBP over 10 million dollars annually.

² Smetanin, P., Stiff, D., Briante, C., Adair, C., Ahmad, S. & Khan, M. (2011). The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011 to 2014. Risk Analytica, on behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada

³ 2024 NAMI Workplace Mental Health Poll

⁴ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada. <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/5020>

At January 31	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Accepted Claims	613	595	607	617	617
% Mental Health	47.3	49.2	48.1	48.6	50.4
% of mental health claims which include interpersonal conflict as contributor	N/A	N/A	24	37.6	45.3

Mental health disability within DBP has a growing pattern in why members are leaving work. More claims include interpersonal conflict as a contributing factor, pointing to workplace conditions and relationships, not just individual illness, as a key driver of disability.

This trend reinforced what DBP staff were already hearing directly from members: many mental health leaves are triggered by unresolved workplace issues, particularly breakdowns in communication, conflict with leadership, or psychologically unsafe environments. Once members leave work, those issues often remain unaddressed, increasing the duration and complexity of claims and making return to work more difficult.

A 2007 audit of the DBP’s early intervention program demonstrated a \$3 return for every dollar invested. We recognized these trends and considered that focusing on psychological health and safety in Manitoba Schools was a natural extension of DBP’s early intervention work, addressing root causes collaboratively before challenges lead to sick leave or disability claims.

This project was designed to explore whether earlier, workplace focused support could reduce escalation, support members in remaining at work, and prevent or shorten disability claims.

Long term, we believe this intervention will benefit the various stakeholders in the following ways:

- Improved health and wellbeing of all Members and school staff
- Workforce stability and improved productivity through reduced absenteeism and presenteeism
- Reduced costs to the DBP
- Less demand on Teacher Welfare
- Alignment with MTS’s mission of safeguarding the welfare of teachers.
- Reduce the percentage of Mental health Claims

Addendum:

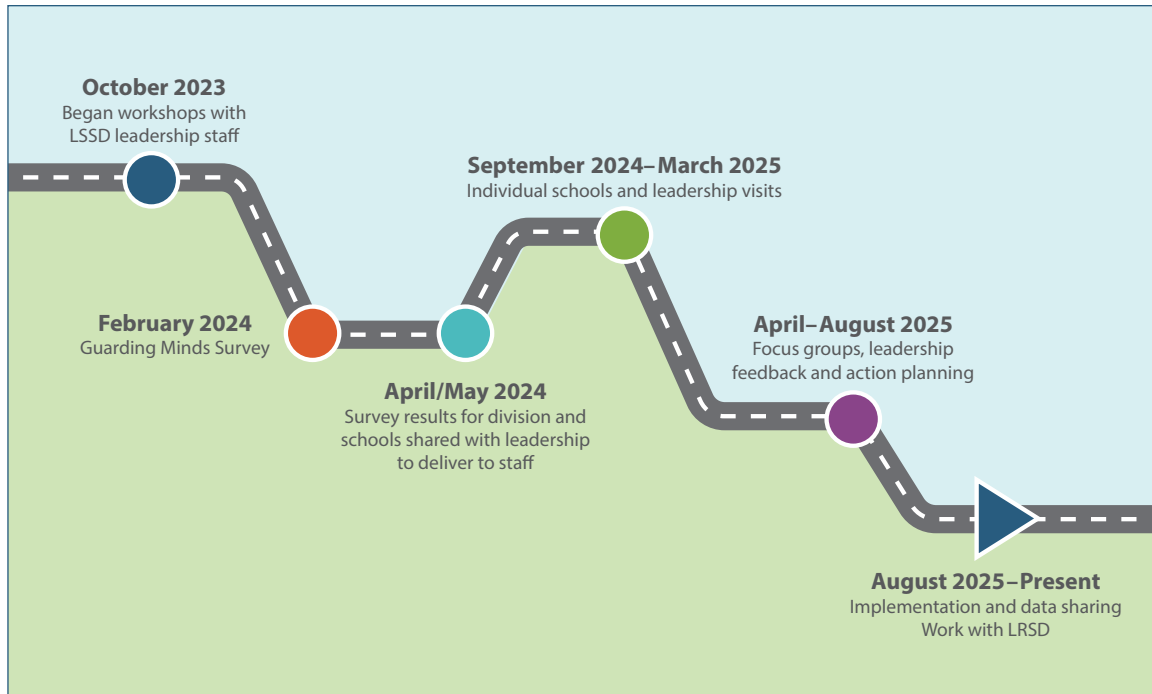
Enabling workers to work in psychologically safe workplaces was added to the objects and purposes of the Workplace Safety and Health Act on June 3, 2025⁵. As a result, expectations are shifting towards employers and their role in creating and sustaining psychologically healthy workplaces; one that actively prevents harm and promotes mental wellbeing.

This legislative change occurred during the project and was not contemplated at its outset.

⁵ [The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act](#)

Process

See Appendix A for detailed project outline.



The DBP pilot project was a comprehensive initiative designed to explore a range of ideas and tools that could support a replicable, sustainable and scalable service model. Beginning in October 2023 and continuing into present day, the project started with presentations to the Lord Selkirk School Division (LSSD) and evolved into a series of workshops for school leaders focused on staff wellbeing, leadership strategies, and communication frameworks. These sessions introduced tools such as VIA Strengths and the SCARF model, explored psychosocial factors affecting mental health, and emphasized the importance of creating psychologically safe workplaces. A Guarding Minds survey was also conducted to assess staff perceptions.

Given the DBP’s lack of experience with the Guarding Minds survey and interpreting the data, we requested guidance from Ed Can. EdCan, through their *Well at Work*⁶ programing, had expertise in administrating and analysing the results from the Guarding Minds Survey, in an educational context. They agreed to work with both the DBP and LSSD to gather the data that met the needs of both parties.

In the fall of 2024, we began school visits, reviewed school specific Guarding Minds data and developed plans around 4 initiatives:

- Managing parents
- Improving school culture
- Planning for staff absences
- Onboarding and welcoming staff returning from leaves

⁶ [About Well at Work | EdCan Network](#)

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the LSSD project expanded to include focus groups with teachers, educational assistants, and other staff to further analyze and contextualize survey results. Findings from these focus groups were shared with divisional leadership to inform, review and identify next steps.

Additional workshops addressed cultural sensitivity, administrator wellbeing, and strategies for fostering positive school culture. We also had the opportunity to present to various school divisions, speak on podcasts, and train workplace health and safety committees on psychological health and safety.

In the fall of 2025, LSSD rolled out a plan for the following two school years that included:

- Expanded, role and school specific training for educational assistants
- Improved check-ins and reporting following violent incidents
- Dedicated time for elementary staff to complete report cards
- A mentorship program for new teachers and administrators
- Increased, coordinated visits to schools by senior leadership
- Ongoing review of leadership roles and supports, improvements to professional development days, and increased opportunities for all-staff meetings

We recognized that the complexity of the principal's role needed a more simplified and practical approach to psychological safety and school wellbeing. In the fall of 2025, the project introduced the *Fearless Organization* approach to the LSSD leadership group. Based on the research of Amy Edmondson, this approach focuses on building team environments where there is a shared belief that it is safe to take interpersonal risks.

An external consultant was brought in to facilitate a professional development morning for administrative leaders and to model this approach in the context of improving the effectiveness of monthly meetings. This topic had previously been difficult to discuss. As a result, several format changes were implemented and will be tested in meetings through to the end of June. Overall, participants responded positively to this approach to navigating challenging group conversations. Evaluation results are included in Appendix B.

Louis Riel School Division

In September 2025, we became involved with a *Leadership for Wellbeing* learning series pilot with 17 schools in the Louis Riel School Division ("LRSD"). Details are available for review in Appendix C. This 6-session pilot incorporated the lessons learned from LSSD data-driven school planning, staff engagement and co-design of wellbeing strategies. This is a condensed model from the one we used in LSSD for a larger, metro school division comparison and ongoing learning. It emphasizes early intervention, shared responsibility, and ongoing attention through leadership development sessions, feedback from staff and action planning focused on organizational culture. The goal is to create psychologically healthy school environments that support both staff and student success while reducing disability claims and absenteeism while improving overall workplace wellbeing.

Challenges to Psychological Safety in an Education Environment

Psychological health and safety in schools is shaped by complex issues across all levels. Challenges exist within individual relationships, the school community and within the broader system. **The education system itself is inherently high-risk for psychological harm.**

MICRO	to	MACRO
Relationships	Complexity of Schools	System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal is key • Generational shift • High stakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse needs • High workloads and increasing demands • Systemic pressures (assessments, funding) • Unique stressors in different roles (Teachers, EAs, Admin, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal issues • De-professionalization • Built in hierarchy • Professional code of conduct • Emotional labour of educators • Lack of training/ Integration of roles • Isolation • Leadership gaps • Evolution of systems/beliefs

Relationships Matter:

- The Principal is the key influencer of the psychological health and safety within a school. Full stop. Their communication style, emotional awareness and relational skills shape whether staff feel safe and supported.
- Principals who do not prioritize relationship-building as part of their leadership style, find it difficult to create a culture of belonging and risk taking. This challenge is compounded when senior leadership doesn't create expectations and accountability around relationship building. Without this support it is difficult for principals to affect culture and whole staff accountability if this is not a priority of the division.
- Generation Z have different expectations of themselves and their employers more so than other generations. They value technology, collaboration and work-life balance and are comfortable with speaking about mental health. This can be a point of frustration for many leaders who have divergent experiences and who are balancing the needs of multi-generational employees⁷.
- There is much at stake when one is navigating relationships with parents, students, and staff. While ongoing support is essential during difficult situations, it is often hardest to access when stress levels are high.

⁷ [Characteristics of Gen Z in the workplace: insights & strategies - Workable](#)

Complexity of Schools:

- Classrooms today present a diversity of needs that are complex and high stakes. Core working conditions include diverse and complex student needs, high workloads, and continually increasing, under-resourced and unsupported demands.
- Teachers report that more is being asked of them and that they are expected to “do more with less”. This leaves them feeling like they will never meet the expectations of students, parents and leadership. This feeling of hopelessness can create apathy.
- More students require assessments and interventions, for which there are limited supports. As a result, many students fall through the cracks, creating more complexities down the road and feelings of frustration and guilt for staff.
- Each role within the school and division has their own set of stressors. This can feel overwhelming to leadership when everyone needs something different. It can also lead to isolation for those groups whose stressors never rise to a level of priority for leaders.

Systemic:

- Schools exist in the world around them. Broader societal tensions place additional strain on teachers and school leaders who are required to maintain safe and inclusive environments for the school community.
- Teachers face misperceptions and misinformation from the public without an avenue to address them.
- Efforts to de-professionalize educators and privatize education have increased pressure on the system and people working within it. This can create a culture of fear, mistrust, and constant scrutiny, negatively affecting morale and psychological safety.
- The education system is hierarchical in nature. This top-down approach is difficult for the younger generation and has historically created resentment at the school level and throughout the system. This is particularly noted by non-teachers working within the system.
- The Professional Code of Conduct can be a barrier to psychological safety when a person is asked to continually go back to the person who is causing them psychological harm or to take significant interpersonal risk in speaking up. It should be noted that the Workplace Health and Safety Act supersedes The Professional Code of Conduct.
- The emotional labour of educators today is higher than ever due to the increasing complexity of classrooms, often leaving staff with little energy for building relationships; an essential component to building psychologically safe working environments.
- Due to the difficulty in securing substitute teachers, training has suffered not only in role-specific ways but also through reduced opportunities to collaborate across teams.
- Staff report feeling lonely because of system demands, leading to isolation and a reduced sense of community; two factors correlated to wellbeing.
- There is a lack of training to prepare leaders for their roles. They are primarily trained to work with children/adolescents and they receive little preparation on how to manage adults in a workplace, a large and significant part of their responsibilities.
- As society evolves, so too should the education system and its held beliefs and values. Poor adaptation and clinging to old ways and outdated practices makes improving psychological safety more difficult.
- Taken together, these challenges help explain why schools are high-risk environments for psychological harm. The work is complex, demands continue to increase, resources are limited, and pressures are constant. In this context, psychological health and safety cannot be assumed or left to chance.

Acknowledging this inherent risk is not a criticism of schools or the people who work in them, but a necessary step in creating the conditions for intentional and meaningful action.

Learning

Throughout the project, several key learning points emerged that both deepened our understanding and shaped the direction of this work:

1. Relationships Are Key

Systems change in education must be built through people and relationships. Leadership development, ongoing mentorship, and sustained follow-up for action proved far more effective than stand-alone training sessions.

As the pilot progressed, simplified and relational models of psychological safety emphasized trust, interpersonal risk-taking, and shared responsibility. These resonated more strongly with school leaders and resulted in observable changes in behaviour, confidence, and staff engagement.

2. Inclusion, Trust and Data Collection

It is imperative that all school employees are included in any surveys or focus groups related to psychological safety. Excluding groups creates an incomplete picture of a school or division and makes it difficult to develop effective action plans.

In environments where trust is already fragile, survey design and implementation require particular care:

- Requests for identifying data (e.g., gender, role, school) raised concerns about anonymity and had the potential to skew results.
- Some Guarding Minds questions were unclear about whether they referred to the school or the division, further complicating interpretation.
- Clear communication prior to survey distribution was critical, including how anonymity would be protected and who was being referenced as the employer. The LSSD president was helpful in supporting this process.

Focus groups following the survey proved to be the most informative component of data collection, but only after trust had been established. These conversations were essential in understanding how staff defined terms such as bullying, accountability, and loneliness, and were critical to shaping next steps and action planning.

It also became clear that:

- Guarding Minds was not developed with education specifically in mind.
- Alternative or adapted tools better suited to education may need to be explored.
- Survey fatigue is real, and follow-up surveys should be approached cautiously to avoid reduced participation.

3. Framework and Simplification

This project began using the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, and the Guarding Minds survey is grounded in that framework. As the work progressed, it became clear that the breadth and complexity of the Standard could feel overwhelming to school leaders who were already navigating numerous daily demands.

As a result, the work shifted toward simplifying both the language and the approach, aligning more closely with relational models such as Amy Edmondson's work on psychological safety and relationship-building.

4. Training, Follow-Up, and Support

Professional development on its own has not been effective for long-term learning or meaningful change. Participants reported forgetting content quickly when training was not regularly revisited or supported through implementation.

Key learning included:

- Individual follow-up with leadership teams was essential for meaningful action and change.
- Ongoing mentorship and implementation support mattered more than one-time sessions.
- This work is hard, tiring, and slow. Even highly committed leaders required encouragement and sustained support.

5. Trust, Relationships, and Action

Trust-building with leadership and staff was foundational to the work. Meeting individually with leaders to understand their specific school challenges supported relationship-building and created space for open and honest communication.

This trust:

- Enabled staff to share ideas and concerns more openly.
- Led to more thoughtful and meaningful action planning.
- Helped people see their input as valued and influential.

It was also critical that once data was gathered and analyzed, the work quickly became action oriented. Psychological safety should never be framed as another initiative, but rather as a commitment to long-term learning and change.

6. Leadership Influence and Accountability

Leadership style was consistently identified as having a significant impact on staff morale and school culture.

- Staff reported principals being more present, open, and supportive because of the project.
- Feelings of loneliness among staff were closely linked to leadership practices.
- DBP observed an increase in claims reported during the pilot period, but with shorter durations, suggesting more people were reaching out earlier and returning to work faster.

At the same time, lack of accountability and trust in leadership emerged as common barriers to psychological safety and wellbeing. Many employee groups shared examples of gaslighting and lack of follow-through. Deeper exploration revealed that these issues were often rooted in limited training, lack of support, and leaders feeling trapped in impossible problem-solving situations. Less-recognized leadership roles like Learning Support Teachers who supervise Educational Assistants were often excluded from leadership training and were identified in focus groups as barriers to psychological safety.

7. Communication Challenges

Communication was a concern across all levels of the division. While many strategies were attempted, this remained one of the most difficult challenges to address due to:

- Varying staff preferences
- Competing priorities
- Unequal access to technology
- Burnout

8. Role-Based Inequities and Vulnerable Groups

Across employee groups, Educational Assistants were consistently identified as underpaid and poorly treated. This was attributed to lack of recognition, hierarchy, substitute shortages, and general disrespect. Attention to these concerns within LSSD resulted in changes that left EAs feeling heard, more recognized, and generally better supported.

More broadly, non-teaching staff often reported feeling treated differently, not respected for their expertise, and lacking a sense of belonging. Clinical services staff in both divisions reported burnout rates as high as 100 percent and were identified as a high-risk group. They described loneliness, erosion of collaborative time, misunderstanding of their roles, and space and privacy challenges that conflicted with professional college requirements.

Where groups have experienced poor treatment over extended periods, trust erosion was evident. In these cases, positive changes often went unnoticed. Repairing trust requires acknowledgement of past harm, collaborative solutions, patience, perseverance, and time.

9. Recognition, Connection, and Community

Recognition emerged as a strong theme across all employee groups. Staff expressed a desire for leaders to better understand their daily realities through observation and presence, not just symbolic gestures.

While events such as appreciation days were valued, staff emphasized that day-to-day verbal acknowledgement had a far greater impact.

Post-COVID reduced social connection was also noted. Encouragingly, staff expressed genuine interest and enthusiasm in rebuilding connections, generating ideas for bringing people together both during and outside of school hours.

10. Physical Safety and Psychological Safety

Finally, it would be remiss to discuss psychological safety without acknowledging physical safety. While violence in schools was outside the scope of this project, there can be no psychological safety without physical safety.

Recent Workers Compensation Board data shows rising physical and psychological injuries among Educational Assistants, reflecting increasing volatility in school environments. The 2022–2024 Workplace Safety and Health report identifies education as a high-risk sector, reinforcing the need for continued attention to both physical and psychological hazards.



Physical and Psychological Claims for Educational Assistants 2020 to 2025

	Physical Claims						Psychological Claims					
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Reported Claims	323	483	534	788	972	958	7	•	11	10	15	34
Accepted Claims	290	421	451	685	893	917	•	•	10	8	13	24

* Claim counts have been masked when the displayed values do not meet the WCB's data disclosure threshold, which is a minimum of five.

11. Tracking Outcomes

Quantitative Measures

Intended outcomes can be tracked quantitatively by using DBP data, including rates of sick bank notifications, rates of STD and LTD claims, and claim duration trends. Although there are some early indicators of less sick time usage and shorter claim durations, conclusions about the project interventions are limited because the data is influenced by external factors such as member demographics, employer reporting practices, and analysis is limited by disclosure thresholds.

Analytical confidence in the interpretation of results can be strengthened by using larger sample sizes with phased or school level comparison groups where possible, and by tracking outcomes for at least two years after implementation to avoid overinterpreting normal year to year variability. The DBP will require dedicated data and business analysis support for longer-term tracking, including maintaining comparison groups and by tracking outcomes for at least two years after implementation to avoid over interpreting normal year-to-year variability.

Qualitative Measures

Many of the anticipated benefits of the pilot program are long-term. The interventions and resources are delivered in stages, and even once participants have completed all phases, the downstream effects on workplace culture within a school or division will not be immediate. Perceived changes, captured through surveys and interviews, are strong indicators of potential long-term shifts in behaviour and attitudes. Because wellbeing and mental health improvements are difficult to measure using external or quantitative metrics, these outcomes are best assessed through qualitative methods. Pilot project feedback is incorporated into this report in Appendix D.



Equity and Psychological Health and Safety in Schools

Individuals who experience marginalization are more likely to face additional psychosocial risks in the workplace, including discrimination, microaggressions, isolation, and reduced access to support. These experiences increase vulnerability to psychological harm, even in environments that may appear safe on the surface.

In school environments, this means recognizing that staff do not experience working conditions in the same way. Differences in role, identity, power, and lived experience shape how safe individuals feel at work and how accessible support truly is. In addition to historically marginalized groups, psychological health and safety must also account for the experiences of Members with lived trauma, prior psychological injuries, and neurodiversity, as these factors shape how individuals experience safety, stress, and support in the workplace.

This project highlighted that within the educational environment, Teacher vs. Non-Teacher roles differ greatly in their levels of visibility, authority and access to decision making. Non-teaching staff have limited influence despite carrying significant emotional and physical demands. This dynamic must be considered in this work.

While this pilot project was not initially designed to explore the interplay between psychological health and safety and equity, learning reinforced the importance of considering the additional layer of psychological safety required for marginalized Members. Future work must consider that these Members face disproportionate risk in the workplace



Recommendations

Our learning in this project has shown that Members understand the concepts of psychological health and safety but struggle to translate their learning into action. In consideration of future work in this area, we've made the following recommendations:

General Recommendations

1. Data Informed Starting Point

Effective psychological health and safety work requires a clear understanding of where staff are struggling.

- A pilot project of this nature would not have been effective without a survey tool such as Guarding Minds, or something similar, to provide leadership with a starting point.
- While Guarding Minds was not a perfect tool, it offered valuable insight into areas of concern and helped identify where action was needed.
- It is imperative that all staff are invited to provide input to develop a complete and accurate picture.

2. Leadership Commitment and Integration

Improving psychological safety requires sustained commitment from leadership at all levels, although it must start with buy-in from the Divisional level.

- Psychological safety should not be viewed as a stand-alone goal or initiative, but as a core way of working that supports whatever goals a division is trying to achieve.
- Ongoing leadership commitment is required, including engagement from Human Resources.
- This commitment includes:
 - Willingness to engage in training, coaching, and ongoing learning
 - Openness to using focus groups to deepen understanding of survey data
 - Agreement to share relevant data, including absenteeism trends

3. Shared Responsibility

Creating a culture of wellbeing is a collective responsibility.

- Psychological safety cannot rest solely with leadership; all staff must engage in developing self-awareness, openness to feedback, and collaboration.
- Attention must be paid to hierarchical structures that leave some staff feeling excluded or less valued.
- The goal is not to eliminate hierarchy, but to address aspects of hierarchy that undermine belonging, respect, and wellbeing.

4. Feedback, Accountability, and Skill Development

Sustainable improvement requires ongoing feedback and accountability.

- Regular feedback mechanisms are necessary as school environments and classroom challenges continue to evolve.
- Feedback without follow-through undermines credibility and can negatively impact engagement.
- Commitment to psychological safety includes accountability for addressing toxic behaviour and willingness to engage in difficult conversations.
- Strong facilitation skills are essential for effective engagement with larger groups and should be prioritized in leadership training.
- Hierarchical structures that leave some staff feeling excluded or undervalued must be addressed.

- Psychological health and safety efforts must increasingly incorporate an equity lens, recognizing different levels of risk across roles and identities.

5. Trust, Context and Action

Psychological safety is only meaningful when it is grounded in shared understanding and followed by action.

- Interpersonal risk-taking is possible only when staff share a common context and believe that their feedback will lead to meaningful change.
- Without shared purpose or follow-through, psychological safety loses relevance and impact.
- Action planning should be collaborative, school-specific, and revisited over time.

6. Time and Capacity

Psychological health and safety work requires intentional allocation of time.

- Time is needed for surveys, conversations, reflection, and follow-up.
- While initial work requires the greatest time investment, ongoing time to revisit and sustain psychological safety is equally important.

7. Collaboration and Respect for Professional Roles

Wellbeing and safety are strengthened through collaborative processes.

- Collaboration must include all staff groups and respect their knowledge, experience, and professional college requirements.
- Inclusive processes contribute to a stronger culture of safety and belonging.

8. Scalability and Ongoing Support

This work must be flexible and scalable.

- Learning from work with Louis Riel School Division highlights the value of starting with willing participants and building internal champions.
- While divisional engagement is ideal for systemic change, working with individual schools can also build momentum within a division.
- Ongoing consultation and support are important for sustaining progress, as new challenges will continue to emerge.

Operational Recommendations

These recommendations reflect the operational realities identified through the pilot and support the need for dedicated capacity.

1. Capacity

- Psychological health and safety work is ongoing, relational, and time-intensive, requiring dedicated staff capacity.
- This work cannot be effectively absorbed into existing roles without compromising quality and responsiveness.
- A defined role should be responsible for coordinating assessment, facilitation, leadership coaching, and follow-up.
- Role should be linked to COSL, MFL, WHS, MSBA, WCB etc.
- Role should be linked to Post Secondary liaisons within PFLS.
- Business and data analysis will be required to support this work and assess service delivery and its impact.

- The program would operate on multi-year timelines, recognizing that trust, culture change, and leadership development take time.

2. Program Delivery

- Broadly, supports will include:
 - Assessment and context-building
 - Leadership coaching and mentorship
 - Action planning and implementation support
 - Ongoing consultation and follow-up
 - Proactive outreach and engagement with interested schools and divisions. Requires targeted engagement with clear information about what participation involves, why it matters, and how it supports psychologically healthy workplaces.
- Engagement should occur over multi-year timelines to allow for trust-building and sustained change.
- Funding for staff remains with the DBP but costs associated with delivering supports must be cost-shared to promote further buy-in.

3. Scalability and Sustainability

- The work should be scalable across divisions while remaining responsive to local context.
- Starting with willing divisions or schools and building internal champions supports momentum.
- Ongoing consultation is necessary as school environments and challenges continue to evolve.



Political Recommendations

1. Local and Divisional-Level Advocacy

- Promote employer accountability for preventing psychological harm and addressing concerns early. Consider liaising over shared agreements and trauma informed policies.
- Encourage action on items that are more harmful in current context: strategies for parents and their unfettered access, violence, violent incident response, medical leaves and returns etc.
- Support meaningful consultation and staff voice, including non-teaching staff and equity-seeking groups.
- Encourage early intervention approaches that reduce reliance on leave, transfers, or claims as default solutions.
- Advocate for leadership accountability related to communication, follow-through, and respectful workplace practices.

2. Provincial-Level Advocacy

- Advocate for recognition of psychological health and safety as a workplace safety issue, equivalent to physical safety. Consider industry specific messaging.
- Support adequate and stable funding to address workload, staffing shortages, and student complexity.
- Promote leadership standards that include managing adult workplaces, conflict resolution, accommodations, and both systems and relational psychological health and safety.
- Centre equity in policy advocacy, recognizing higher risk faced by equity-seeking groups.
- Continue to prioritize advocacy for adjacent matters, such as violence in schools.



Summary

It is important to speak plainly about what this work has shown us. While psychological health and safety should, in theory, be the employer's responsibility, they are not equipped to do this work on their own. While school leaders are looked upon to manage complex workplaces, many feel ill prepared and unsupported. It's no wonder our educational workspaces are inherently high risk for psychological harm.

If we are truly serious about safeguarding the welfare of teachers and all school staff, then guidance, support, and shared accountability are required for meaningful action. This work goes beyond traditional Workplace Safety and Health (despite new legislation) as that structure oversees compliance. This work requires deeper relationship-building and skill development and starts with a willingness to have difficult conversations with an openness to doing things differently.

All education partners benefit when psychological health and safety is addressed proactively.

Benefits to Schools	Benefits to Teachers	Benefits to DBP/MTS
<p>Increased retention</p> <p>Early intervention and resolution of interpersonal conflict reduce prolonged absences, attrition, and reliance on transfers as a solution.</p> <p>Improved productivity and stability</p> <p>Reduced absenteeism supports continuity of learning and decreases dependence on subs allowing staff to focus on their core roles.</p>	<p>Better health & wellbeing</p> <p>Addressing workplace conflict early reduces stress, burnout, and feelings of isolation.</p> <p>Stronger professional focus and growth</p> <p>Fewer disruptions allow educators and leaders to focus on teaching, student support, and professional development rather than crisis management or coverage.</p>	<p>Reduced workload & costs</p> <p>Fewer and shorter disability claims, less personnel matters etc. can ease pressure on DBP, Teacher Welfare and Locals</p> <p>Alignment with MTS Mission</p> <p>This work supports member-centered services and safeguards the welfare of teachers. This supports work of various MTS departments and priorities (violence, retention etc.)</p>

Appendix A

DBP Pilot Project Timeline

2023–2024	Event	Details
Oct 2	LSSD PD Day Presentation	With Dr. Jennifer Lawson & Richelle North Star Scott; Topic: Educator Well-Being & Workplace Wellness; Based on Teacher Take Care; DBP trends and available supports; Outcome: Dr. Lawson became ill > DBP invited to lead 4 workshops for LSSD administrators.
Oct 23	St. Andrews School Meeting	Overview of DBP processes and supports.
Oct 25	Workshop #1 (LSSD Admin)	School Leadership for Staff Wellbeing; DBP trends; Mental health & work connection; Accommodation related to mental health; Intro to VIA Strengths & SCARF model; Supports available to staff; 9am–3pm.
Jan 17 (2024)	Workshop #2 (LSSD Admin)	How staff wellbeing strengthens relationships & culture; VIA Strengths & SCARF deeper work; Intro to Psychological Health & Safety; Communication framework + scenarios; 9am–3pm.
Feb 14	Workshop #3 (LSSD Admin)	Intro to WCB (guest speaker); Review of material to date; Psychosocial hazards & mental health; 9am–12pm.
Feb 5–20	Guarding Minds Survey	All LSSD staff.
Apr 8	Meeting with Happy Thought School	Overview of DBP supports.
Apr 10	Workshop #4 (LSSD Admin)	Administrator wellbeing; Wellbeing as privilege & balance; Guarding Minds results (division + role); Communication framework + collaborative actions; 9am–3pm.
Aug 28	Session with Irene Nordheim	Admin wellbeing and supporting staff wellbeing.

2024–2025	Event	Details
Oct 9–Jan 13	Meetings re: Guarding Minds Data	Met with all principals; Met with LSTA & CUPE presidents; Focus on school culture, managing parents, staff away/returning to work; Met with Student Services & Happy Thought School.
Nov 13–present	LRSD Collaboration	Began work on LRSD Guarding Minds results; Presented Feb 17 & Mar 17; Ongoing planning & DBP involvement.
Nov 27	5th LSSD Admin Workshop	School Leadership for Staff Wellbeing; Guest: Kelly Wiebe; Cultural Sensitivity; 9am–noon.

2024–2025	Event	Details
Dec 4	Brandon University Masters Class	Topics: DBP trends, relationship-building, mental health, shared responsibility, accommodation, SCARF, VIA Strengths, communication framework; 5pm–8pm.
Dec 13	COSL Presentation	Psychological Health & Safety Pilot Review; Findings, survey results, progress, future plans.
Jan 10	Circle Forum Podcast	Discussed Psychological Health & Safety pilot; Learnings re: principal wellbeing.
Jan 15	6th LSSD Admin Workshop	Shared feedback from school visits; 4 reflection questions; Guest: Irene Nordheim; 9am–noon.
Feb 8	Workplace H&S Presentation	Psychological Health & Safety Pilot; Findings, survey review, program collaboration with Irene Nordheim.
Mar 4–19	Meetings with Principals & Senior Leadership	Discussed focus groups, April meeting, planning for next school year.
Apr 14–22	LSSD Focus Groups	Participants: teachers, EAs, secretaries, bus drivers; Reviewed Guarding Minds results; Mixed format (in-person & email); Hourly staff paid; No custodians participated.
Apr 30	7th LSSD Admin Workshop	Reviewed focus group results; Future planning; Identifying actionable steps.
Jun 10	Meeting with Superintendent & Assistant Superintendent	Reviewed Admin action steps: Discussed focus areas based on feedback & results.
Aug 6	Superintendent Planning Meeting	Planning for 2025–26 school year; Upcoming Nov 19 session on Fearless Organization approach.
Aug 20–21	Summer Seminars Presentations	Advocacy for Psychologically Healthy Schools; Topics: PH&S, reconciliation context, responsibilities, challenges, findings, advocacy.
Aug 22	LRSD Wellbeing Sessions Planning	6-session plan for principals & VPs; 2 group sessions, 3 school visits, final review; Runs Oct–May; 17 schools enrolled.
Aug 26	Circle Forum Podcast	Updated learnings from Psychological Health & Safety in Schools pilot.

2025–2026	Event	Details
Sept 16	Seine River Teachers' Association Presentation	Psychological Safety Pilot Project; Project overview and future plans.
Oct 9	Lord Selkirk Teachers' Association Presentation	Advocacy for Psychologically Healthy Schools; Topics: evolving definition of PH&S, responsibility, LS data, challenges, advocacy steps, next steps.
Oct 10	Prairie Rose Teachers' Association Presentation	Advocacy for Psychologically Healthy Schools; Topics: definition of PH&S, reconciliation context, responsibility, challenges, findings, advocacy.
Oct 30	LRSD Session #1 – Leadership for Wellbeing	Workplace wellbeing meaning; PH&S awareness; Key concepts & frameworks; Individual/collaborative/systemic factors; Dual continua model; Dynamic wellbeing framework; Manitoba Leadership Framework; Indigenous worldview; School Wellbeing Toolkit.
Nov 14	WPHS Chairs Training Presentation	Definition of PH&S; Responsibility; LS project; Findings; WPHS role in psychological safety.
Nov 14	LRSD Clinical Services Meeting	Focus group configuration and points of discussion.
Nov 19	LSSD Admin Meeting	Reviewed April 30 results; Discussed Fearless Organization material; Agreed to apply 7-question scan; Interest in restructuring meetings for clearer purpose.
Nov 27	LRSD Session #2 – Leadership for Wellbeing	Self-awareness; Key concepts; Relationship building; Team-building ideas; VIA character strengths.
Dec 8–Jan 7	Clinical Staff Focus Groups	Focus groups held for School Clinical Staff.
Dec 5–Jan 22	LRSD Pilot School Visits	Individual school visits conducted.
Jan 14	Fearless Organization Scan	Scan with LSSD Admin Leadership during leadership meetings.

Appendix B

January 14, 2026 AC Session Feedback Slip

The following responses were received from 19 participants.

Session Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate this workshop?

- 1 – Limited 0 responses
- 2 – Basic 0 responses
- 3 – Good 7 responses
- 4 – Very Good 12 responses

Note on Confidentiality

To protect the privacy and anonymity of all participants, individual comments from the workshop have been summarized rather than shared verbatim. The following section reflects the overall sentiments, trends, and key messages that emerged from the feedback without attributing any statements to specific individuals. The DBP Committee had the opportunity to review all comments in their entirety.

Overall Impressions

Participants described the session as a meaningful first step toward strengthening psychological safety and effectiveness across the leadership team.

Key themes included:

- Strong appreciation for open, honest dialogue and neutral, supportive facilitation.
- High engagement, with activities and discussions noted as relevant and helpful.
- Desire from some participants for more structure, visual aids, or clearer introductions of facilitators.
- Acknowledgment that deeper team issues remain and may require further exploration.

Most Helpful Aspects

Participants consistently highlighted:

- Open, vulnerable discussions—especially being able to speak candidly with senior leaders.
- Feeling supported in a safe environment, both in small and large groups.
- The session’s design, including:
 - Guided conversations
 - Small-group interactions
 - Demonstrations of psychological safety in practice
- New insights into team dynamics and strategies they can apply within their own schools and departments.

Less Helpful Aspects

A smaller set of themes emerged regarding challenges:

- Logistics, including timing, the half day length, and absences or early departures.
- A desire for deeper exploration of certain activities, such as post it reflections.
- Some confusion around:
 - Historical team issues referenced
 - The facilitators’ roles or intentions
- One participant questioned whether the creation of tension during facilitation was necessary or distracting.

Key Takeaways

Participants left the session with a strong collective understanding that:

- Psychological safety and trust require ongoing, intentional work.
- Many team members share similar experiences and concerns, reinforcing the need for culture and structure change.
- Vulnerability, openness, and respectful disagreement are important and possible within the group.
- There is widespread desire for positive change and a belief that improvement is achievable.

Additional Comments

Other reflections included:

- Appreciation for the opportunity and encouragement to continue this work.
- Interest in further learning, including team development models.
- Suggestions for clearer facilitator introductions in future sessions.
- Recognition of the importance of developing strong feedback skills as part of the team culture.
- Overall sense that the session contributed positively to building a more connected and psychologically safe leadership environment.

Appendix C

Leadership for Wellbeing: Learning and Planning Series

Purpose:

- Learning focus: Explore factors that influence employee wellbeing through facilitated workshops, a community of practice, and professional coaching.
- Leadership focus: Guide and support leaders in developing school-level plans for enhancing staff wellbeing through specific actions and shifting school culture.
- Collaborative vision: Build a commitment to a culture of wellbeing through collaboration, structured reflection, and a shared commitment.

Resources:

- Frameworks for wellbeing and systems change
- TCI training
- Coaching
- Shared reflection and staff engagement

Data:

- Guarding Minds survey data

Timeline and Commitment:

- 2025–26: Learning and planning
- 2026–27: Implementation

Sessions Overview

Session	Description	Key Topics	Format	2025-2026
1. Exploring workplace wellbeing	Key concepts, frameworks, definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does workplace wellbeing mean? • Individual, collaborative, and systemic factors • Mental illness vs. mental wellbeing (dual continua model) • Dynamic wellbeing framework • Connect to “the Good Life” and Indigenous worldview • Observation and conversations as data collection • Link to staff efficacy and student success 	Larger group session Joint facilitation	Oct. 30
2. Foundational tools for leadership for wellbeing	Connect leader SEL and approaches to staff wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional intelligence and self-awareness • Connections to TCI, SCARF, VIA character strengths • Reflection on strengths and growth areas • Strategies and skills to practice • Psychological safety and its role in trust and efficacy 	Larger group session Joint facilitation	Nov. 27
3. WB data – predictions and interpretations	Contextualizing, applying, and analyzing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors influencing workplace wellbeing • National and divisional trends • Predictions and GM data • Strengths and successes • Areas to grow • Appreciative inquiry • Begin planning school-level wellbeing session • Attention to equity • Shared wins 	School-level meetings	Dec.–Jan.
4. Staff engagement with WB data	Engaging staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors influencing wellbeing • Predictions and GM data • Current and future context • Staff identify focus topics • Include non-professional staff • Shared leadership approach 	School-level meetings	Feb.–Mar.

Session	Description	Key Topics	Format	2025-2026
5. School-level planning	Co-designing actionable wellbeing strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design thinking • Leverage strengths • Student wellbeing • Integrate actions for sustainability • Shared ownership • Amplify voices • Other metrics • Develop actionable plan 	School-level meetings	April
6. Where are we now? What comes next?	Sharing progress and refining cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate progress • Share wellbeing plans • Refine Plan–Act–Observe–Reflect cycle • Reflect on learning • Recommend division actions for sustainability 	Larger group session Joint facilitation	May 12

Appendix D

Psychological Health and Safety in Schools Pilot Project Feedback Summary

The following responses were received from 25 participants.

Note on Confidentiality

To protect the privacy and anonymity of all participants, individual comments from the workshop have been summarized rather than shared verbatim. The following section reflects the overall sentiments, trends, and key messages that emerged from the feedback without attributing any statements to specific individuals. The DBP Committee had the opportunity to review all comments in their entirety.

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the project?

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
Facilitator/ Trainer	1			2	22	
Overall Content	1	1	2	9	12	
Topic Relevance	1	1	2	3	18	
Group Training	1		5	7	11	1
School Visits		1	1	7	13	3
One on One Support		1	5	3	9	7
Guarding Minds Survey	1	6	3	12	2	1
Focus Groups		2	4	8	9	2

Overall Feedback on the Project

Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage in work focused on psychological health, workplace relationships, and administrator wellbeing. Many valued the supportive, candid, and non-judgmental approach taken by Shauna and noted that the project offered meaningful insights into staff experiences and school culture.

At the same time, several participants struggled with limitations in the survey tools, inconsistencies in available data, or challenges with participation due to scheduling or school events. Some felt the data was skewed or outdated, or that small staff sizes limited the usefulness of results. Others wished for clearer survey wording, more definitions, or stronger pre-survey communication to avoid misinterpretation.

I was able to apply what I learned?

Yes, right away (within the first 3 months)	14
Yes, over time (within the first year)	9
Not yet but I plan to in the future	4
No, I don't think it will apply to my work	0

A strong majority reported being able to apply what they learned, either immediately or over time. Gains were commonly noted in:

- Increased knowledge and skills
- Stronger relationships
- Greater personal confidence
- Improved processes within their own programs (for some)

A few participants, particularly those new to their roles, noted they were still working toward applying the learning fully.

I have seen an impact in the following areas as a result of applying what I learned.

Increased personal confidence in my abilities	11
Increased knowledge/skills	15
Stronger relationships	11
Improved processes and/or systems	3
Other	3

Highlights of Staff Support in the Project

Participants frequently commented on:

- Her kindness, candor, and non-judgmental approach
- Feeling validated and heard
- Action-focused conversations that helped clarify what they could control
- Helpful one-on-one sessions
- Her ability to address difficult topics while remaining supportive
- Positive energy, empathy, and strong listening skills

Several people noted that the process helped them understand their staff better, brought awareness to challenges, and supported personal reflection.

Areas Participants Wished Had Been Covered

- More solutions and concrete strategies
- More time on “what to do next”
- Specific tools for addressing staff concerns
- Additional divisional or senior admin action steps
- More discussion on admin mental health, stress, and burnout
- Deeper exploration of building positive culture

- Using the data to create actionable plans
- Research-based practices and examples from other schools
- Opportunities to discuss issues without upper administration present

How likely are you to recommend this project to other school leaders?

Not at all likely					Extremely Likely					
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1				2	1	4	9	5	3

Most participants rated the project in the mid-to-high range. Positive ratings were driven by:

- High relevance of the topic
- Quality of the facilitator
- Feeling supported and heard
- Valuable information and opportunities to reflect
- Importance of the work for schools and divisions
- The project supporting practical tools and conversations

Lower ratings were linked to concerns about:

- Survey flaws or skewed data
- Time commitment
- Uncertainty about seeing real change
- Feeling that responsibility for improvement sits mostly with administrators

Suggestions for Future Improvement / Next Steps

Themes included:

- Clearer pre-survey communication and definitions
- Follow-up steps and visible action at the divisional level
- Consistency in roles, committees, and initiatives
- More “how to” resources and concrete strategies
- Additional examples of successful practices in other schools
- Continued focus on staff who may be psychologically unwell
- Creating anonymous ways to ask questions and receive support
- Involving administrators earlier in the process (e.g., reviewing survey items)
- More time for solution-focused conversations and planning
- Support structures such as an AC team to assist schools
- Addressing admin wellbeing and stigma around seeking help



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