Grand Erie District School Board

Be Well Campaign
Supporting the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy

2017 NSPRA National School Communication Award
Gold Medallion Award Entry
Special Communications Projects/Campaigns

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#GEBeWell
SYNOPSIS

Grand Erie District School Board is a medium-sized district with 26,000 students in 75 schools. Located in Southwestern Ontario, the district borders a section along the shores of Lake Erie and is home to Canada’s largest populated Indigenous Reservation.

Grand Erie’s vision is *Success for Every Student*. The district recognizes that success looks different for every student, including those who struggle with mental health concerns. Positive mental health is essential for success.

According to district research, one student in four struggle with a mental health concern.

Referrals to mental health supports in the community is a challenge. Most specialized/inpatient mental health services reside outside the district’s borders resulting in lengthy waitlists. School social workers respond to tragic events involving staff, students and families and include deaths by suicide.

In 2013, Grand Erie created the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy giving educators the tools they need to identify students who struggle with mental health challenges, connect school supports with community services and promote resiliency. Three focus areas emerged: Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Literacy and Mental Health Promotion.

Although the strategy generated enthusiasm among the district, there was no communication associated with the strategy and, as a result, there was a breakdown in message and in its implementation.

In an attempt to create organizational change through the strategy and move the district from illness to wellness, a communications effort was initiated, resulting in the *Be Well/Campaign*.

During the spring of 2016, strategies and tactics included an awareness campaign, student-led events, website presence, posters, face-to-face meetings with students, a media relations plan and a social media contest.

These activities, combined with an evaluation plan, proved to support a consistent message and helped raise awareness about where students can get help and how to be well.
PROGRAM SUMMARY | RESEARCH

Secondary Research

Educators know first-hand how the mental health of a child can affect his or her attention in class and overall academic success. The Ontario Ministry of Education committed to supporting children and youth mental health in 2011 with resources to school districts. This information became a source of secondary research that included formal, quantitative data. Information also became available from mental health agencies including the Centre for Mental Health & Addictions and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

- 1 in 5 children struggle with their mental health across Ontario
- Early identification and intervention leads to improved school achievement, better health outcomes and cost-savings to the health care and social service systems
- 70 per cent of mental health issues have their onset in childhood and adolescence - which can lead to conflicts with family members, trouble in school and feelings of isolation; left untreated, mental health issues become more serious and difficult to manage

Primary Research

Grand Erie conducted its own primary research to develop the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy and to inform the communications plan. Focus groups with community partners and students formed the primary research. A district-wide student survey was also conducted in 2014 to provide primary, formal, quantitative data. Multiple staff surveys were administered. Parents were also surveyed and ranked mental health in the top five issues they wanted to learn more about.

- 1 in 4 children struggle with a mental health concern in Grand Erie
- Students, grades 7 to 12, with moderate or high levels of anxiety equates to 25 per cent
- Students, grades 7 to 12, with moderate or high levels of depression equates to 25 per cent
- Grand Erie students are above the Canadian norm, which is 18 per cent for anxiety and depression
- Anxiety concerns peak for students in Grade 10 and depression peaks for students in Grade 12
- 71 per cent of students reported to have a positive self-esteem; this dips lowest for Grade 10 students (65 per cent) and was reported highest in Grade 7 students (82 per cent)
- Less than 30 per cent of students call Crisis Lines

Problem Statement and Situation Analysis

Students in middle and high school (Grades 7-12) are dealing with higher levels of mental health concerns (anxiety, depression, mood disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder etc.) in the Grand Erie District School Board that impact their well-being and overall achievement in school. Tragically, students without treatment have resorted to death by suicide. Although there is support to address students facing mental health concerns, from social worker staff, educators and some student-led/peer groups, there was a missing opportunity to clearly communicate the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy to the district.

Goal

Students will know where to get help and how to be well as a result of school environments that support mental health and well-being.

Objectives

Objectives for Students

1. By May 2016, 25 per cent of students surveyed will be aware of the supports made available through the Be Well Campaign related to the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy.
2. By May 2016, 5 student-led initiatives will take place in secondary schools related to the goals of the mental health strategy.
3. The Be Well Campaign, initiated in March 2016, will generate more than 5,000 hits on the website by May 2016 and generate 250 entries in a Be Well pledge accessed online by March 31, 2016.
Objective for Staff

4. By May 2016, 50 per cent of staff surveyed will be aware of the supports made available through the communication efforts related to the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy.

Objective for Parents

5. As a result of a pre- and post-awareness survey at the School Council Session held April 6, 2016, 20 per cent of the parents will report a better understanding of the Be Well Campaign.

Objectives for Community

6. Generate 80 per cent key message pick-up in earned media by May 2016.
7. By May 2016, 1,150 acts of engagement will take place on social media.

ANALYSIS / PLANNING

Strengths and Opportunities

Staff, community partners and parents were engaged in the topic of mental health and school-based events were being planned. There was a lot of attention on the topic as staff, unfortunately, often dealt with student mental health concerns in school. There was enthusiasm to turn the conversation from illness to wellness. There was also potential to save a life and manage the anxiety levels among youth. The campaign would increase the district’s overall social media presence, connect communication with students and demonstrate the value of research/evaluation to inform communications.

Weakness and Threats

Educators, in particular guidance counsellors, may have overstepped their ability to accurately support students who struggle with anxiety or depression. There was a lack of coordination and alignment in mental health initiatives throughout the system and the message was complex. The greatest threat was moving forward without a plan to reduce the stigma related to mental health and to prevent suicidal ideations. There was also job action and labour disruptions during the research stage of the communication plan. As a result, some routine, system-wide survey opportunities and other previously scheduled events were cancelled.

Audience Identification, Profile and Analysis

The primary audience identified were secondary students. According to the research, anxiety peaked for Grade 10 students and depression peaked for Grade 12 students. Secondary students were further identified into two groups. The first group was identified as ‘influencers’ or ‘student leaders’ and the second was identified as ‘at-risk’ of not being able to reach graduation, which included a focus on the Indigenous student population. In order to create organizational awareness and create a shift in school culture, the student publics identified needed student-leaders to inspire change for all students in the school.

Grand Erie also required staff to be champions in this effort and the internal primary publics identified included principals, senior administration, trustees, guidance counsellors, teachers, social workers, and educational assistants.

The secondary audience included publics such as parent groups, media, mental health agencies, education stakeholders and the broader community including residents of non-Grand Erie students.

Key Leaders and Consultation Plan

- **Students**: Secondary students from Simcoe Composite School were the key student advisory group.
- **Director of Education and Senior Administration**: Together with two principals, this group of senior administration forms Executive Council. Two meetings were held as part of the consultation and they provided the approval and direction to move forward with the campaign.
• **Guidance Counsellors:** The campaign identified a pathway to care for students. Guidance counsellors were the staff members who students identified as the key group to go to for help. An input session was held with this group, representing all 15 secondary schools in the district.

• **Staff Wellness Committee:** Before launching the campaign to the district, a consultation was held with a group of staff whose mandate is to bring health and wellness initiatives to staff. The rationale to share with this group aligned with their belief that students are at their best when staff are well.

• **Elected Trustees:** Trustees were provided information at a Board Meeting prior to the launch of the student-inspired mental health and well-being campaign.

### Student Voice and Application of Research

The voice of youth was essential. Many focus groups were held to work through the communications planning process. The campaign was co-created by students.

- Students wanted to frame the conversation about mental health in a positive manner, not negative
- Students suggested the best practices on how their peers received messages including seeing posters, hearing morning announcements, and engaging through social media
- Social media was the best form of communications shared among student leaders in the school but not necessarily by school board social media accounts
- Students shared how they would access help and what their path to receive care would be when in crisis for themselves or for a friend (i.e. through guidance counsellors)
- Prizes would be an incentive to support student awareness

### Key Messages

Talking about mental health is complex and can be associated with stigma. The messaging was validated by students and staff. The simplicity of the message was easily understood, made a positive sound bite and advanced the goal.

- We want you to know where to get help and how to be well.
- Everyone has mental health. Everyone’s wellness is different. How will you be well?

### Budget

The budget totaled $7,000 CDA and was based on the strategies, tactics and activities identified in the plan. The budget was allocated to the purchase contest prizes such as fitbits, yoga mats, and an iPod Touch, as well as posters, magnets and video production.

Staff resources included three staff in the Communications and Community Relations department and the School Mental Health and Well-Being Lead. Three interns from the Mohawk College Public Relations Certificate Program provided 105 hours each to support the effort.

### COMMUNICATION / IMPLEMENTATION

#### Strategy No. 1: Create engaging opportunities, led by students and the district, to empower students to create an environment that promotes mental health and well-being.

Four events were identified and coordinated by staff to bring the Be Well Campaign to those opportunities. An additional two more events emerged as a direct result of schools who were inspired to promote the Be Well Campaign. Tactics for each event varied from video production, feature stories, pitches to media, and campaigns on social media. Event titles and dates included: Day of Dignity (September 29, 2015); Student Talent Show (April 27, 2016); Bloomsburg School’s Mental Health Fair (April 14, 2016); Hagersville Secondary School’s Indigenous Wellness Event (April 21, 2016); Indigenous Student Symposium (May 19, 2016); and Let’s Chalk, an event during Mental Health Week (May 2 – 6, 2016).
Strategy No. 2: Build an awareness campaign to support the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy.

A fresh new brand for the portfolio and for the Be Well campaign was created. Among the tactics and activities, the following were implemented: the dissemination of posters, held face-to-face meetings with secondary students, engaged a plan with the media, shared memos to staff, ordered magnets, produced a video, conducted a social media campaign, created two contests, used the Director’s blog to highlight the message of wellness, distributed a newsletter, and promoted the campaign through stories on the website.

November, 2015 – February, 2016: Planning
• Co-created the branding and visuals for the mental health campaign with students; held focus groups with students and face-to-face consultations; developed the Be Well poster series: Connect, Reach Out, Recharge, and Don’t Wait; and produced a #GEBwell video starring students.

March, 2016: Be Well Campaign Launch
• Media Release: Be Well Campaign Shines a Light on Mental Health in Grand Erie, February 29; media events in all areas of the district connecting reporters with students; secondary school student visits, March 3, 4, 7 and 8; memos to staff, February 26 and March 1; magnets, February 29; website, February 29; implemented social media contest (Individual Entry), closed March 31; implemented social media contest (Student Class, Group or Club), closed March 31; social media campaign, March; Director’s blog post, March 28; newsletter/brochure; promoted wellness clubs in schools; and featured mental health articles aligned with each area of the Be Well Campaign: Recharge, Don’t Wait, Connect, and Reach Out, March 7, 14, 21, and 28.

Strategy No. 3: Accelerate the promotion of student mental health and well-being using Grand Erie’s Equity and Inclusive Education Days of Significance Calendar to leverage awareness about mental health supports.

The Days of Significance Calendar is a collection of significant faith days, national or international days of observation, cultural days and school professional activity days created for the district every school year. Dates associated with mental health and well-being were lifted from this calendar to leverage awareness and focus communications on those days through social media, feature articles, videos and school participation. The Days of Significance chosen and supported with communication resources included: World Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, 2015; Movember for men’s mental health, November, 2015; Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, November 16-20, 2015; Human Rights Day, December 10, 2015; Exam periods, Week of January 25, 2016; Bell Let’s Talk, January 27, 2016; Random Acts of Kindness Week, February 14-20, 2016; Pink T-Shirt Day, February 24, 2016; and Mental Health Week, May 2-8, 2016.

Strategy No. 4: Focus on staff training to support the school and the mental health and well-being strategy.

Tactics and activities to support this strategy included a monthly publication called Mental Health Minutes, two staff in-service workshops called Mental Health Mondays, and 16 Mental Health Moments, which became a standing item at each Director of Education’s meeting with elementary and secondary principals. Leadership opportunities on student mental health were held for principals at a two-day conference in Niagara-on-the-Lake. A survey was also conducted in February, 2016, to seek input into the future direction of the district through the development of its strategic, multi-year plan 2016-2020. Staff were a key group surveyed and they ranked well-being as the number one priority, even higher than achievement.

Strategy No. 5: Launch the new Curriculum-based program in the system to inform the community to support social and emotional learning of the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy.

As part of the launch of the Be Well Campaign, there was a need to communicate the new Curriculum that supports the social and emotional learning of the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy. This Curriculum included the Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 8 Mind Up Curriculum and the Health and Physical Education Curriculum (mental health components) from Kindergarten to Grade 12. These two Curriculum items were announced in the media release and staff received training in the spring, 2016.
Strategy No 6: Provide face-to-face learning opportunities for parents who represent School Councils and members on the Grand Erie Parent Involvement Committee to create awareness and understanding about mental health and well-being and where they can go to seek help if their child presents in crisis.

The last strategy was executed through face-to-face learning opportunities for parents. This strategy created awareness and understanding about mental health and well-being and where parents could go to seek help if they had a child who presented in crisis. The annual publication, Welcome to School Council Guide, was updated to reflect the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy. Two parent meetings were held (March, 2016 and April, 2016) to present the Be Well Campaign and offer training in the area of suicide prevention.

EVALUATION

Student Evaluation (Objectives No. 1 – 3)

The strategy to evaluate the student objectives was based on finding a diverse sample of students from across the district who may or may not have been directly involved with the mental health campaign. An environmental, Eco-focused student event was selected as it was coordinated by another program division of the district. The next stage in the student evaluation strategy was to administer a series of surveys to an active group of Student Council members from each high school. A focus group session was also conducted with these students.

- 63 per cent of the students surveyed said they were aware of the mental health initiative; 88 per cent reported they knew where to get help; and 145 students were surveyed.
- 6 student-led initiatives took place to raise awareness about mental health. (Refer to Strategy No. 1)
- The Be Well Campaign reached 2,752 hits on the website not meeting the output objective of 5,000 during the campaign. This number is consistent with the statistic that was pulled from student data where 92 per cent of the students surveyed said they did not visit the website. It is also interesting to compare these results with the success met with respect to the engagement on social media.
- The contest on the website raised the output objective to an outcome objective when students and staff were asked to take action, complete a pledge and share what they do in their classroom, club, or school to be well. This generated 72 pledges of wellness. Four winners were selected and received a class set of yoga mats, water bottles and a yoga session with a trained instructor.

Staff Evaluation (Objective No. 4)

Similar to the student evaluation strategy, communications staff gathered data from a cross-section of district staff who were directly, and indirectly, involved in the delivery of mental health supports to students. The evaluation was performed during two workshops on two separate professional activity days.

- 53 per cent of staff surveyed reported they were aware of the campaign. While this surpassed the objective, the intent moving forward is to build a stronger connection with internal audiences.

Parent Evaluation (Objective No. 5)

Parents were given an opportunity to complete a survey before and after an event to capture the level of awareness and understanding gained through the communication efforts.

- 69 per cent reported an increase in awareness of the Be Well Campaign and mental health supports, that’s an increase of 49 per cent more than indicated in the objective; parents also reported a 33 per cent increase in the knowledge of where to get help for their child; all 100 per cent of the parents supported the focus on mental health; and 94 per cent wanted to learn more about mental health promotion.
Community Evaluation (Objectives No. 6 – 7)

Measuring social media was a key component to measuring the awareness of the campaign to reach the broader community. A combination of analytics and manual tracking was used. The evaluation identified five social media acts of engagement. From most engaging to least engaging: Followers, Original Posts, Retweets/Shares, Likes/Favourites and Impressions.

- The Be Well social media contest on Facebook and Twitter drew more than 4,000 acts of engagements in a one-month period. The Communications team met weekly to evaluate the engagement levels. Grand Erie increased its followers by 9 percent on both Twitter (359) and Facebook (468) and 10 winners were selected from more than 4,000 entries in the contest.
- The positive media coverage met the objective expectations. Surpassing the original target of three print articles, the campaign received attention from radio and television outlets as well. In all 100 per cent of the coverage, the media published or aired the key messages of the Be Well Campaign.

Next Steps

The success of the campaign moved the #GEBeWell to a dedicated Twitter account, @GEBeWell, to continue the conversation all year. Moving forward, the campaign will deepen its focus to reach Indigenous students and LGBTQ students.

In March 2017, plans are in place to bring the Be Well Campaign to the elementary panel. Included in this roll-out is a Be Well resource kit and posters similar to the ones distributed to secondary schools. Three focus groups were held in three elementary schools to ask the students to identify with the campaign, assess the appropriateness of the language used in the campaign compared to the secondary language used, identify the elementary pathways to care, and provide insight into where elementary students typically receive information.

Grand Erie will explore the implementation of the mental health Curriculum, partner with community agencies to bring this campaign into the community and continue to work with the health units to deliver on the public health protocol, which articulates the relationship between social workers in the district and public health workers.

An ongoing effort will be made to monitor the outcomes of the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy to and determine future alignment with communications. The valuable lessons learned through the campaign will inform a district strategic communications plan, scheduled for release in March, 2017.

Included in this plan, based on the lessons learned from the Be Well Campaign, will enrich the district’s understanding to strengthen internal communications, explore new social media opportunities to engage students, staff, parents and the broader community, take more risks with the district’s visual identity, and listen to the student voice to inform communications.
Secondary research was provided by the following organizations:

Grand Erie staff are shown in the picture wearing bracelets that read 1 in 5 representing the provincial static of the number of students living with a mental health concern.

Ontario Ministry of Education’s Well-Being Strategy for Education:

Learn more at ontario.ca/eduvision
Student focus groups were held to gather perception research and develop the *Be Well* campaign:

Grand Erie District School Board sponsored a mental health awareness campaign that was coordinated by community partners. Funded in partnership with the *Student Support Leadership Initiative of Brant, Haldimand & Norfolk*, this campaign was the first communication strategy that students would have seen related to mental health.

During the focus groups, students said they wanted to continue the positive tone of the neon colours in this campaign and carry them into the new campaign.

Images: Students specifically said they did not want to see dark colours or sad images such as students in front of lockers, head buried in their hands or crying. They wanted mental health to be in a tone of wellness and hope. They didn’t want to further the stigma that would exist if their peers saw them reading the poster.
Be Well Campaign posters:

Grand Erie’s website on the day of the launch and Be Well web pages: www.granderie.ca/bewell
Media release:

Be Well Campaign Shines a Light on Mental Health in Grand Erie

Brantford, ON: Students will know where to get help and how to be well as a result of the Be Well Campaign that brings wellness into the heart of the conversation about mental health.

“Positive mental health and well-being is essential for student success,” said Liana Thompson, Superintendent of Education. “As we shift our mental health focus from illness to wellness, we’re providing more opportunities for our school cultures to inspire hope for all students.”

Co-created by secondary students, the Be Well Campaign explores four main themes that simplify the complexity of mental health: Don’t Wait, Connect, Recharge, and Reach Out.

The themes provide students with the opportunity to know where to get help when in crisis, identify signs in others who may be in need of support, assess their own state of wellness and learn the power of relationships, conversations and connections to make a difference in the well-being of others.

The Be Well Campaign is a reflection of Grand Erie’s Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy, introduced in 2012. The strategy raises awareness and provides resources towards suicide prevention, mental health literacy and mental health promotion.

In addition to the Be Well Campaign, Grand Erie is committed to offer training for teachers on the components of the revised Health and Physical Education Curriculum that address mental health, coping and resiliency. As well, elementary schools can explore wellness through the MIND UP Curriculum, which teaches social-emotional learning skills through a focus on mindfulness, and nurtures optimism and happiness in the classroom.

A culture of wellness is also being celebrated in many schools. Students are engaged in the practice of yoga and mindfulness while others are leading student wellness clubs, among other initiatives.

“Students learn at their best when supported in a culture of wellness,” said Heather Carter, School Mental Health Lead for the Grand Erie District School Board. “Asking students to be well and letting them know where to get help will lead to positive outcomes in school and in life.”

Among other means of communication, Be Well posters and magnets will be available in all secondary schools. Learn more at www.granderie.ca/bewell.

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www.granderie.ca
#GEBeWell
Link to Youtube video and a photo collage of the backstage production:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTc6f65UCml

Be Well Brochure:

Be Well Magnets:
Social Media Contest:

Sample social media posts associated with the campaign:
Continued sample social media posts associated with the campaign:

Social Media created by others using the hashtag #GEBEWell during the campaign:
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS | EVALUATION

There were fourteen secondary school visits to meet with students and promote the initiative.

Statement from a Delhi District Secondary School student who belonged to a suicide prevention peer group during a school visit:

“This campaign has given our group a new purpose. We actually don’t want students to come to us because that means they ARE in crisis. Through Recharge and Connect, we can reach out to other students in a new and meaningful way.”

Contest winners link to feature story and photo:
Email testimonial:

Just wanted to thank you for such a great program for the students.
It has definitely made a huge difference in my class (6th grade Student Math... lots of characters...)

This morning I had a student stay after class... I could tell something was up with him all day... he's usually quite chatty.

He shared with me that a friend he knew at another school had told he was thinking of killing himself and he didn't know who else to go to to ask for help.

I told him that I was proud of him for telling me and that it must be a huge burden for him to hear news like that.

We looked at the Don't Walk - Get Help! page and talked about the resources he can call or have his friend call (or both). I really talked up REACH as I have used them in the past. I also told him it was a good idea to tell his friend's parents.

He was a lot calmer and felt confident after the little chat.
I'm 100% convinced without the BeWell campaign he wouldn't have been confident enough to reach out to me...

So thank you! It's definitely working.

Be well.

Mathematics Teacher

Link to Sample Coverage:

- The Brantford Expositor:
  [http://www.brantfordexpositor.ca/2016/03/04/new-campaign-helps-students-be-well](http://www.brantfordexpositor.ca/2016/03/04/new-campaign-helps-students-be-well)

- The Simcoe Reformer:
  [http://www.simcoereformer.ca/2016/03/03/wellness-room-a-safe-haven-for-students](http://www.simcoereformer.ca/2016/03/03/wellness-room-a-safe-haven-for-students)

- The Sachem:

Photos of presenters during keynote presentations about the campaign across the province:

An unexpected form of measurement was received during the campaign. The Manager of Communications and Community Relations and the School Mental Health and Well-Being Lead were asked to present on the communication plan to School Mental Health ASSIST, a provincial implementation support team designed to help Ontario school boards promote student mental health and well-being.

In addition the two staff presented to communication colleagues from the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPBSA) in Toronto and later to the greater membership of elected trustees in Ottawa.

As well, they presented at the Child and Youth Mental Health Summit in Toronto to provincial stakeholders in children and youth mental health and education professionals.
Additional events supporting the evaluation of the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy

Online tracking form to collect the Be Well Pledge:

Pre- and post-survey administered during parent event, April 6, 2016:

Mental Health Week, Let’s Chalk Event, May 2 – 8, 2016:
All 75 schools participated in ‘chalking’ about mental health.
Moved #GEBeWell to a dedicated Twitter account, @GEBeWell to continue the conversation: