

WellAhead

Imagine if we unleashed all schools' full potential to foster the social-emotional wellbeing of children and youth.

Apart from the home, schools are the most influential setting for child and youth development. Adding wellbeing to an already packed schedule can be a challenge, so there is a desire among school communities to find new and creative ways to integrate wellbeing within their existing daily practice. Educators, parents, students and community partners have started working together to help make it happen.

WellAhead Strategic Focus

WellAhead is a philanthropic initiative of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation that aims to improve child and youth social-emotional wellbeing by building capacity in school communities. The initiative focuses on one of a diverse range of complementary approaches to addressing the needs of schools and students: the integration of wellbeing into school culture, practices and environment (see figure 1). Over the next five years, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, WellAhead will work with communities and provinces across Canada to advance how schools can make wellbeing part of their DNA.

Canada ranked **#17 of 29** wealthy countries for child wellbeing and **#24 of 29** when children’s self-reported wellbeing is taken into account

Starting in British Columbia, WellAhead’s first year will explore the impact of everyday experiences and interactions within the school setting on student wellbeing. The focus is on “everyday practices that make a difference”: sustainable, scalable approaches to advancing student wellbeing that don’t require major resources to implement; that fit naturally within the role and skill set of educators and school partners; and that build upon existing assets and capabilities. WellAhead recognizes that social-emotional wellbeing can be influenced by many different factors, such as relationships and connectedness, physical activity and nutrition, the built environment, school-community connection and more. We are interested in helping school communities explore how small changes or enhancements to their practice or ways of being can yield a significant impact on student wellbeing.

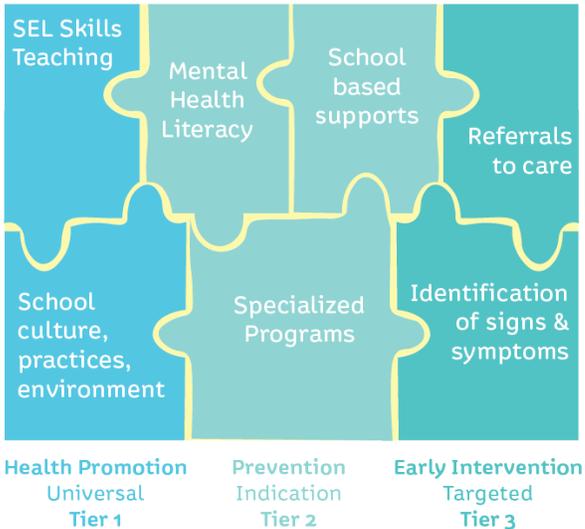


Figure 1.

What is an Everyday Practice?

The term “everyday practice” refers to the actions and interactions that take place in the day-to-day of schools. Sometimes they are deliberate, and other times they are just part of our natural practice. In our consultations, we heard people talk about the little things that make a difference - saying hello, creating positive convening spaces, getting a little bit of exercise at key points during the day, taking mindfulness breaks – and the perceived impact these had on students. Sometimes these practices are informed by research or taken out of a particular program or curriculum, other times they are new ideas borne out of practice and experience. WellAhead aims to better understand and validate the real impact of these tangible, everyday practices on student social-emotional wellbeing and share what is learned to help inform practice in school communities across Canada.

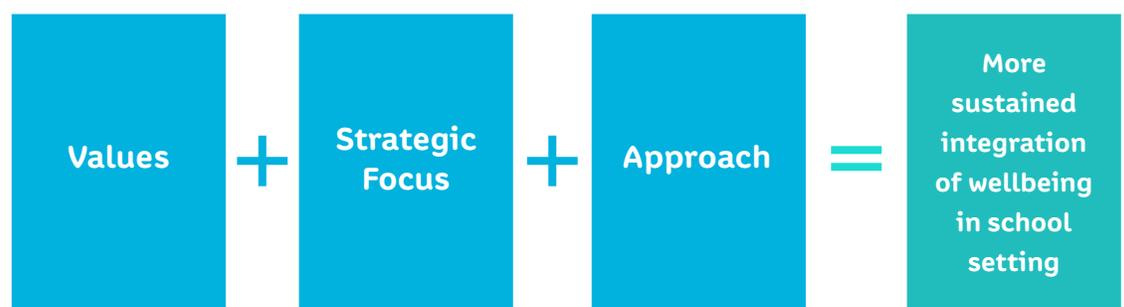
WellAhead Values

The WellAhead model is based on two years of consultation and research on school-based wellbeing efforts, and is an attempt to address the challenges, opportunities and desires stakeholders have on this topic. These learnings have been translated into a set of core values and principles:

- > **Collaboration:** WellAhead aims to bring people together from many different stakeholder groups and perspectives to collectively determine how to advance wellbeing in schools. This approach recognizes the different types of knowledge that exist, and the importance of leveraging all of them rather than favouring one.
- > **Mass participation:** Education is an issue of public interest, and requires broad input and buy-in in order to inform future directions. WellAhead aims to include as many people as possible in its processes through wide consultation, fluid opportunities for participation, and novel methods of engagement.
- > **Collective ownership:** Rather than providing people with a solution, WellAhead is designed to help communities shape their own vision, and support them in a change process. We aim to act as a catalyst and convenor for community-led efforts.
- > **Transparency:** There is so much to learn if we openly share our learnings. WellAhead will make all its tools and materials openly available, and will actively share what is learned along the way in a manner that sparks discussion and informs practice.
- > **Emergence:** Complex problems are difficult to plan around. As such, WellAhead embraces an emergent approach whereby plans and directions are iteratively and informed by feedback from partners and stakeholders.

Theory of Change

WellAhead has an overall goal of improving child and youth wellbeing, and we believe that greater integration of wellbeing into the school system is a good place to start. Our hypothesis is that the set of values upon which this model is based, in combination with its strategic focus and social innovation lab approach may help achieve sustainable change at scale:



45

percentage
of time
Canadian
students
spend their
waking
hours in
school
during the
school year

Next Steps

WellAhead is working with six pilot districts in British Columbia for the 2015-2016 school year, each of which will run the social innovation lab process in their communities:

- > **43 Coquitlam:** an urban community near Vancouver, and the third largest school district in BC
- > **48 Sea to Sky:** a mixed urban/rural community north of Vancouver
- > **61 Victoria:** an urban community on Vancouver Island that also happens to be the capital of BC
- > **67 Okanagan Skaha:** a mixed urban/rural community in the interior Okanagan region of BC
- > **70 Alberni:** a rural community on central Vancouver Island
- > **92 Nisga'a:** a remote Indigenous community on the Northern coast of BC and the third smallest school district in BC

We will also begin exploring how WellAhead can deepen its impact in British Columbia, and how we might extend our work to build capacity in other provinces and territories.

Contact Us

Feel free to contact us for more information, or to share your ideas and thoughts on WellAhead. For information about our implementation in British Columbia, please contact our BC Provincial Lead, Mali Bain at mbain@mccconnellfoundation.ca. For more general information about WellAhead, including our national scope and work with other provinces, please contact our national lead, Vani Jain at vjain@mccconnellfoundation.ca.

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