

Module 1

Introduction: Well-being at School

JCSH School Well-being Toolkit



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Introduction: Well-being at School

Module Overview: Purpose and Scope

This module provides educators and school health professionals with an introduction to perspectives and practices associated with well-being at school. A central theme of this introductory module is to set the stage for the promotion of well-being perspectives and practices in a range of areas essential to the creation of a healthy school environment, including:

- ✿ Strengthening Student Connectedness (Module 2)
- ✿ Engaging Student Strengths (Module 3)
- ✿ Fostering Agency and Voice (Module 4)
- ✿ Building Student Resiliency (Module 5)
- ✿ School Team Well-being: Mental Fitness (Module 6)
- ✿ School Team Well-being: Resiliency (Module 7)
- ✿ Positive School Leadership (Module 8)

This module begins with an overview of well-being, integrating insights emerging from mental health and positive mental health promotion. The central theme of well-being at school is discussed in the context of research and practices associated with the *Health Promoting Schools* framework. At the close of this module, concepts related to collaborative actions focusing on well-being at school are presented.

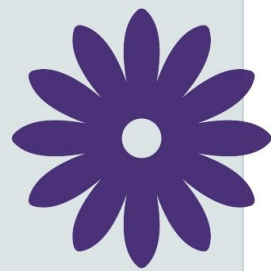
Objectives of this module:

- To gain an understanding of the dual-dimensional model of well-being and the psychological well-being of people
- To recognize the benefits associated with embracing a Health Promoting Schools approach to well-being at school
- To enhance action planning efforts related to the promotion of well-being at school

Well-being at School Defined

The World Health Organization's conceptualization of youth well-being goes beyond a sole focus on mental health concerns or problems, emphasizing a developmental perspective related to growth and thriving. *Positive mental health* encompasses features such as fostering a *positive sense of identity*, acquiring *social and emotional skills*, believing in one's inherent *capacity to learn*, *engaging strengths* and realizing *personal potential*. Schools with a focus on positive mental health promote a sense of *cultural competency*, *inclusivity* and *Indigeneity* within their interactions with students, families and the greater community.

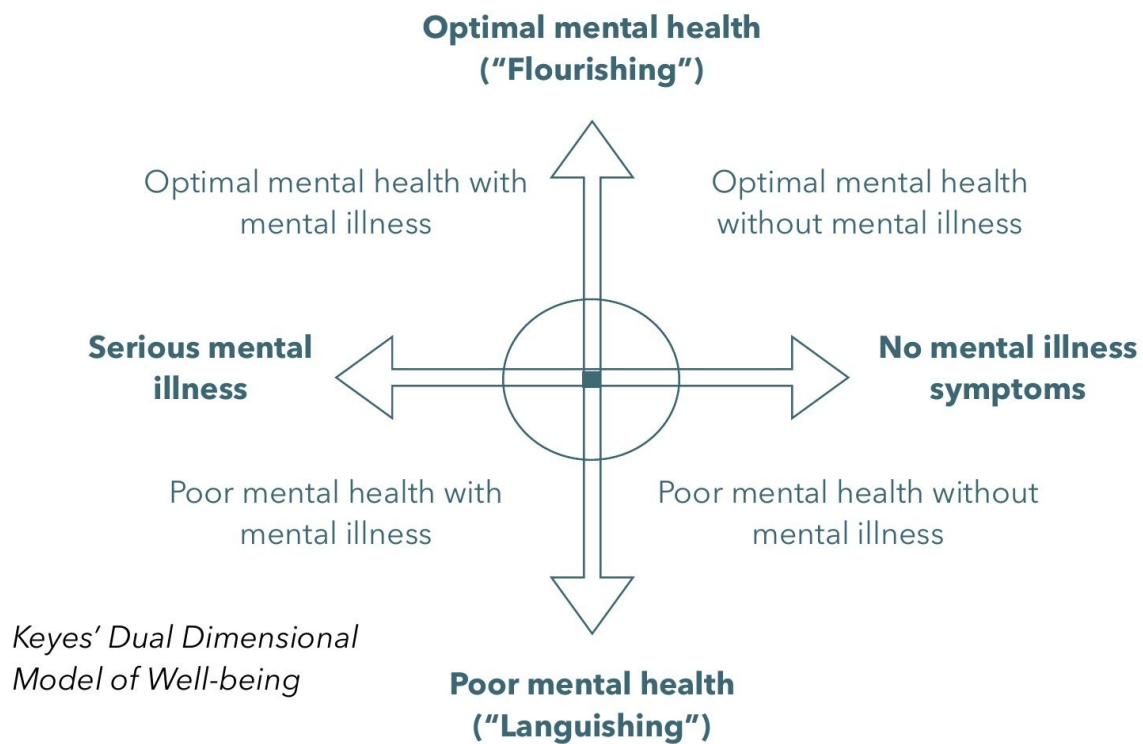
The terms *mental health* and *positive mental health* are defined within Keyes' (2016) *dual-dimensional model of well-being*. One dimension involves the recognition of personal mental health challenges and the need for personalized supports, and the second highlights individuals' potential for positive development when provided with the necessary environmental conditions for *flourishing*. Consistent with Keyes' flourishing dimension, educational research has placed an emphasis on the creation of a positive learning environment to promote the well-being of students and their capacity to learn and thrive (Keyes, 2016).



In the *School Well-being Toolkit*, promoting well-being at school means understanding perspectives and practices that set the conditions for a healthy school environment where students and school teams experience well-being (positive emotions, life satisfaction) and thriving (positive development, purpose and resilience) within their daily learning routines and interactions (McMahan & Estes, 2011).

Dual Continuum Model of Mental Health and Mental Illness

Westerhof and Keyes (2010) identified the presence of mental health and well-being as *flourishing*, and the absence of well-being as *languishing*. In their study of more than 1,200 adolescents between the ages of 12 to 18, they found that approximately 38% of adolescents were flourishing, 56% were moderately mentally healthy, and 6% were languishing. *Schools can make a critical difference in each student's journey toward flourishing through the creation of environments that foster well-being.*



Psychological Well-being Needs of People

Educational research and school policies in Canada are highlighting the importance of building and integrating *relationship practices* into school and classroom routines that contribute to both students' and educators' well-being needs. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), well-being needs include the need for **relatedness** (e.g., having positive connections, being included); the need for **competency** (e.g., recognizing strengths, being valued); and the need for **autonomy-support** (e.g., having voice/choice).

The fulfilment of well-being needs also enhances positive functioning with respect to students' academic development, including their classroom engagement, school persistence, creativity and self-regulated learning. According to the New Brunswick Health Council (2019), satisfying these three well-being needs "leads to sustained adaptive behaviours such as participation in physical activity, healthy eating and less involvement in maladaptive behaviours such as smoking" (p. 29). Overall, fulfilment of these three well-being needs is essential for positive mental health, also referred to as *mental fitness*.

One recent Canadian investigation applying SDT in alternative education sites reported that students with diverse learning needs indicated that their need for relatedness, competency and autonomy had been met in the context of their learning activities, and that such approaches had positively impacted their school relationships, sense of well-being and learning (Hofer, Perry, et al., 2021).

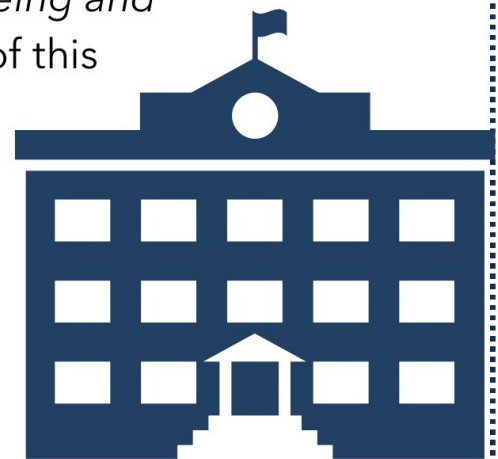


Health Promoting Schools (HPS)

Schools as a Setting for the Promotion of Well-being

For children and youth, the years spent in school are critical periods for their physical, social-emotional and cognitive development. Positive child and youth development is associated with enhanced health outcomes later in life. Given that children and youth spend much of their day within the educational setting, schools become an important setting for the promotion of well-being practices within school relationships (McIsaac et al., 2017).

A UK study investigating young adolescent students and teachers from 25 secondary schools reported that *higher levels of well-being among teachers was associated with better student well-being and lower student psychological distress*. The authors of this study indicated that the association between teacher and student well-being may be explained, in part, as a result of the *quality of relationships between teachers and students* (Harding et al., 2019).



Health Promoting Schools Defined

The Health-Promoting Schools (HPS) framework has been recognized internationally by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a model that underscores the importance of school communities as key settings for promoting the health and well-being of children, youth and adults.

“A health-promoting school is defined as a school that constantly strengthens its capacity as a safe and healthy setting for living, learning and working. The concept of health-promoting schools is a whole-school approach to promoting health and educational attainment in school communities by capitalizing on the organizational potential of schools to foster the physical, social-emotional and psychological conditions for health as well as for positive education outcomes.”
(WHO & UNESCO, p.1, 2021)

HPS Framework

The HPS framework has been applied in many regions as a means of incorporating a comprehensive or school-wide approach to the creation of health promoting educational environments. The implementation of the HPS model and whole-school well-being approaches has been associated with enhancements in many domains of student health, healthy lifestyle behaviours and learning (WHO & UNESCO, 2021).

A school-wide approach to well-being can result in positive impacts on students, enhancing their openness to receiving emotional support and increasing their awareness and practice of the types of behaviours and choices that support personal positive mental health (Donovan, Drane, & Anwar-McHenry 2023). Educators have reported similar outcomes, highlighting the value of *comprehensive well-being approaches that involve students and teachers*.

Numerous studies have pointed to the benefits of school well-being approaches in positively influencing *student academic adaptation and engagement*, as well as impacting the positive mental health and quality of life of both students and school staff team members (Montemurro et al., 2023; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Fung et al., 2012; Faught et al., 2017).

Health Promoting School Guiding Principles and Standards

In Canada, the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) completed a comprehensive literature review and a consensus-seeking process with 53 experts across provincial and territorial jurisdictions to identify a set of standards and associated indicators for the HPS approach. The HPS standards are guiding principles for the implementation and sustaining of the HPS approach within educational settings across Canada. These standards are organized according to four categories: *The Health Promoting School*, *Enablers*, *Canadian Values*, and *Quality Improvement*.

The Health Promoting School

1. School engages the community for the implementation and sustainment of the HPS approach.
2. School leadership is dedicated to the HPS approach.
3. School policies support the HPS approach.
4. School environment is conducive to the safety, health and well-being of students and school staff.
5. School's curriculum and health education prepare students for healthy futures.

Enablers

6. Governing system prioritizes and supports the HPS approach.
7. School health services support the health and well-being of all students.

Canadian Values

8. School promotes equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and Indigeneity.

Quality Improvement

9. Monitoring and evaluation inform the implementation and sustainment of the HPS approach.



Download The
Canadian Standards
and Indicators for
Health Promoting
Schools



Comprehensive School Health Methods within a HPS Framework

The preceding guiding principles for HPS also underscore JCSH's commitment to the provision of comprehensive school health practices in the promotion of well-being at school. Comprehensive school health approaches:

- Affirm that physically and emotionally healthy children and youth are more likely to reach their academic potential
- Recognize that the school setting has the potential to positively contribute to students' positive mental health
- Promote the belief that healthy lifestyle choices positively impact physical health and emotional well-being
- Integrate health into all aspects of school life and learning
- Bridge health and educational concerns and systems
- Require the support and collaboration of families, community members, and service providers (JCSH, 2013).

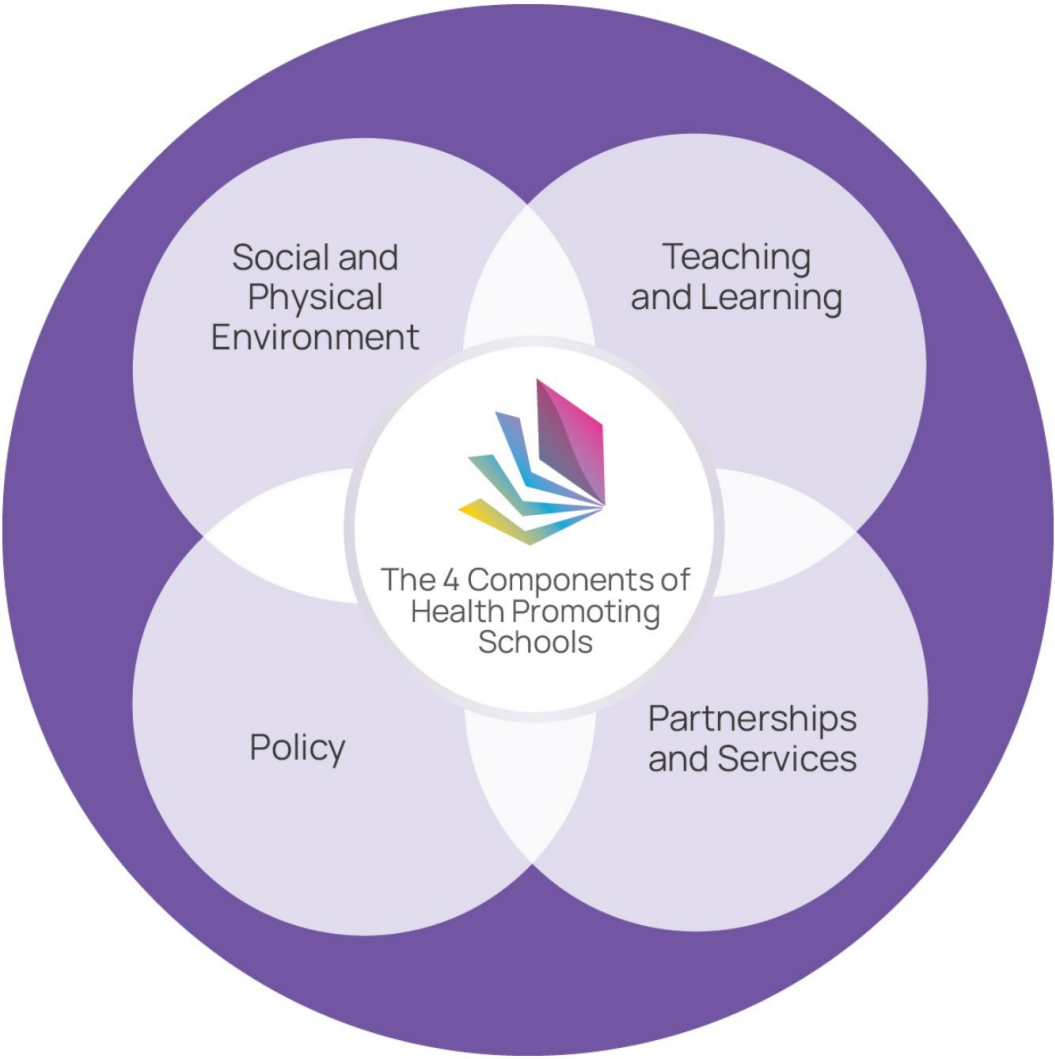


Health promoting school methods incorporate a whole-school approach encompassing four inter-related components:

- **Social and Physical Environment:** Physical and emotional safety; school and classroom climate; use of physical spaces
- **Teaching and Learning:** Differences and diversity in the classroom; culturally-relevant practices; cooperative methods; autonomy-supportive practices; strength-focused applications; social skill development.
- **Policy:** Policies for positive leadership; policies that promote safe and caring environments; policies for inclusion; discipline policies that restore and reconnect; policies for professional development and training; student services policies that provide timely support and shared policies that ensure system collaboration
- **Partnership and Services:** Sustained family contact and communication; adult-student mentorship programs; partnerships with family and youth-serving agencies; school and community-wide mobilization activities

(Morrison & Peterson, 2013)

Clicking on each component of the Health Promoting Schools schematic below will enable the downloading of a series of positive mental health practices for promoting well-being at school. These practices are delineated in JCSH's 2013 publication *Schools as a Setting for Promoting Positive Mental Health*.



Well-being in Action: Key Insights from Canadian Schools

In a recent investigation of six Canadian school districts, 55 school community members participated in individual semi-structured interviews to explore their respective stories of how and why they were able to shift their school environments to those that prioritize well-being. The findings of this study revealed five key insights related to the promotion of well-being at school (Montemurro et al., 2023). The health promoting school insights delineated in this study included:

1. Valuing Perspectives Related to Individual and Collective Well-being

Participants in this study conceptualized well-being as multifaceted and inclusive of diverse aspects (e.g., physical, emotional, social, spiritual, environmental)

Researchers noted that specific aspects of well-being vary among individuals, becoming more or less of an area of focus or emphasis at certain life stages or within specific contexts. In addition to individual aspects of well-being, participants highlighted the importance of *collective well-being* and its relevance to the school learning environment and workplace.



2. Addressing Student and Staff Well-being Concurrently

Across school communities, participants reported that student and staff well-being needs were interconnected and should be addressed comprehensively rather than in isolation. Within some school districts, the initial focus on student well-being through curricular integration of social and emotional learning or changes to the social or physical environment had been accompanied by expanded conversations and school-wide efforts to promote staff health and well-being. Enhancing both student and staff team well-being concurrently was regarded as essential to creating positive learning and workplace environments.

3. Engaging Leadership Support for the Prioritization of Well-being

School and district leadership were identified as critical for supporting and sustaining well-being as a priority. In some instances, district leaders were identified as being the catalyst for promoting both the value and vision for well-being initiatives among schools. Clear messaging and information exchanges regarding well-being and leaders' modelling of well-being practices were also noted as impactful in reinforcing an emphasis on well-being at school.

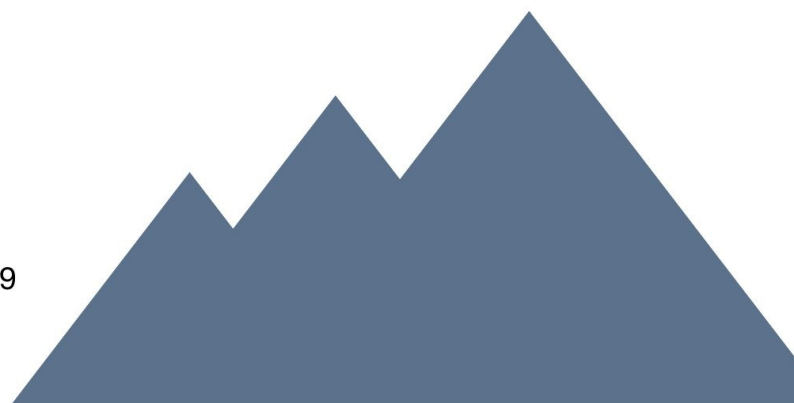


4. Coordinating Well-being Initiatives and Linking Actions by School Champions

In some regions, central coordination of well-being initiatives was undertaken at the district level with linked well-being actions being led or organized by champions at the school level. Well-being champions often included both students and staff members who played key roles in envisioning, planning and executing school-based well-being actions. Central district coordinators, described as possessing strong knowledge about well-being across developmental levels, often served in a coaching capacity for school champions, building viable plans and solutions to respond to emerging challenges.

5. Promoting Connectedness and Voice

Both informal and more structured opportunities were provided for members of the school community to connect in conversations, work on collaborative teams, and have fun together. These opportunities were noted as beneficial for fostering a sense of belonging and reinforcing an emphasis on well-being at school. The development of a relational school environment supported the promotion of positive emotions and encouraged opportunities for discussions about well-being.



These “occasions for connection” were identified as effective opportunities for the initiation and formulation of school-based well-being actions through the engagement of diverse student, staff and school leadership voices. These exchanges encouraged the meaningful participation and decision-making of members of the school community, fostering their ownership of planned well-being activities or initiatives. In many instances, venues for dialogue within the school workplace and learning

environment moved beyond a sole focus on well-being at school to informal, supportive conversations where members of the school community shared personal strengths, needs or challenges with one another. Giving voice to educators, administrators and students was viewed as effective for increasing the relevance of well-being activities and for further engaging their collective participation (Montemurro et al., 2023).



Monitoring and Evaluation of HPS Well-being Initiatives

“Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental to the HPS approach. Monitoring and evaluation help document progress and achievements (such as in learning and health), help identify challenges and emerging needs, and help inform the ongoing implementation and sustainment of the HPS approach. Monitoring and evaluation typically involve gathering information on each of the Standards and Indicators from the provincial/territorial governments, school authorities, schools, students, and other members of the school community to track HPS activities and achievements” (JCSH, 2023, p. 28).

Data collection and analysis are essential for evaluating the success of implemented HPS well-being initiatives at district or school levels. These efforts should include diverse sources of data that facilitate data triangulation and that provide a comprehensive understanding of the school setting (context evaluation), the rollout of well-being activities or initiatives (process evaluation), and areas of potential change or impact related to well-being at school (outcome evaluation) (JCSH, 2023; Morrison & Peterson, 2024).

Data gathering may involve a range of methods and participants, including:

- **Students** providing feedback on their experiences, needs and well-being, as well as their engagement in well-being activities within their classroom or school settings. Example data collection methods include structured classroom feedback sessions, focus group interview sessions across developmental levels, or the use of online pulse surveys that benchmark factors such as student well-being, engagement and quality of school relationships.
- **Educators, classroom teachers and administrators** sharing observations regarding student engagement and responsiveness to school well-being initiatives, as well as experiences related to personal well-being, the learning environment or workplace culture. Example data collection methods include observations, qualitative or descriptive formative evaluation reports, individual or focus group interviews, or the use of standardized measures related to the school environment.
- **Parents and Family Members** sharing perspectives on the perceived influence or impact of HPS initiatives on student well-being, learning or engagement or feedback regarding their collaborative role or participation in well-being actions. Example data collection methods may involve focus groups, surveys or key informant interviews.

- **School-Wide or District-level Data Sources** that align with the goals of well-being initiatives. Example data sources include student health or wellness surveys, employee engagement surveys, parent perception surveys, or other systems that track student engagement, participation or adaptation.
- **Health Professionals, Wellness Staff and Community Stakeholders** collaborating on initiatives and sharing feedback on the rollout and impact of school and community well-being activities or initiatives. Example data sources include discussion forums, individual or focus group interviews, or collaborative consensus processes to benchmark progress towards HPS or school well-being indicators.

When data from multiple sources are gathered and compiled according to a structured schedule, progress monitoring reports may be created, shared and reviewed. Such methods assist in providing evidence-informed directions for the continued enhancement of school well-being initiatives, approaches or practices. Determining potential sources of accessible data should include a review of existing school and district level data gathering approaches, measures or reporting systems. The use of current data sources and data gathering efforts should be aligned with defined process and outcome indicators linked to the HPS indicators (JCSH, 2023; Morrison & Peterson, 2024).

Using Pulse Surveys for Real-Time Monitoring

A key component of effective well-being monitoring is the ability to capture timely, actionable data that reflects students' mental health, engagement and school experience. Pulse surveys provide a brief, accessible and digital method to regularly check in with students, allowing schools to track changes over time and respond proactively to emerging trends.

One such innovative initiative is the New Brunswick *Youth Check-In* (YCI), a province-wide, student-focused survey designed to assess youth well-being in real time. The YCI survey is administered twice per year and provides schools with an overview of student mental health, school relevance and social connectedness. The benefits of using a pulse survey such as the YCI include:

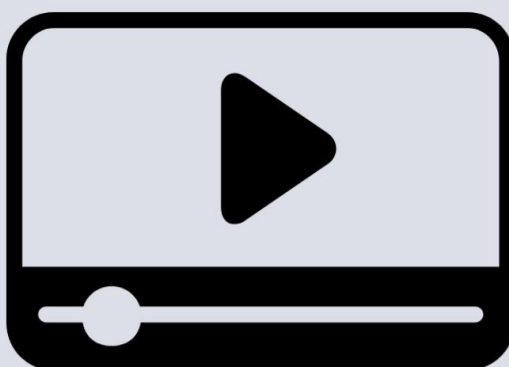
- * **Quick and Engaging Format:** Pulse surveys take just 2 to 5 minutes for students to complete, ensuring high participation rates without disrupting learning time.
- * **Immediate School-Level Insights:** Reports are automatically generated after each survey period, offering real-time data to inform school-wide strategies.
- * **Confidential and Actionable:** While individual responses remain anonymous, aggregated results highlight key trends, allowing schools to adjust practices, enhance support systems and promote well-being.
- * **Benchmarking Over Time:** Repeated check-ins throughout the school year allow schools to track progress, identify patterns and validate their efforts in fostering student well-being.

Implementing Pulse Surveys in Schools

Schools interested in adopting a pulse survey approach can consider integrating a system similar to the YCI model into their existing Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework. By regularly gathering student feedback on well-being indicators, schools can strengthen student voice and engagement in decision-making and enhance youth well-being initiatives through evidence-based interventions.

To explore the full application of pulse surveys in schools across New Brunswick, an example Youth Check-In (YCI) report can be downloaded for reference, providing further insights into how schools have leveraged this tool to promote student flourishing and positive learning environments.

Sample Youth
Check-in Report
*NB Education and Early
Childhood Development*



*Watch an overview of New Brunswick's
Youth Check-in Survey*

Digging Deeper

Mental Health and Well-being in Education
Norwich, Moore, Stentiford & Hall, 2022



Mental Health in Schools Strategy
BC Ministry of Education



Implementing Adolescent Well-being and Health Programs in Schools
Dariotis et al., 2023



Module 5 References



JCSH School Well-being Toolkit Checklist

This checklist can help schools ensure that they are fully prepared to implement well-being strategies effectively.

Toolkit
Checklist

