

NEWS RELEASE

WSD School Support Teams have new tool to help young people

Pilot project between Winnipeg School Division and Huddle creates direct connection between youth hubs and local schools

February 7, 2023 (Winnipeg, MB) – The Winnipeg School Division (WSD) is pleased to partner with Huddle, an initiative of the Province of Manitoba and Shared Health together with United Way Winnipeg and other philanthropic partners, for a pilot project to help improve educational outcomes by removing barriers to health care, mental health and substance use treatment and support, and a range of other programming intended to get youth the help they need.

“We’re happy to continue strengthening the connections between Huddle youth hubs and local schools, which are on the front lines of helping young people with their mental health,” said Ben Fry, Chief Operations Officer, Mental Health and Addictions, Shared Health. “As one-stop shops, Huddle sites provide youth with front-door access to a range of mental health and substance use services together with other wrap-around supports. The Huddle Integrated Youth Services (IYS) network is well positioned to link to and provide these supports in an integrated, coordinated, culturally safe and trauma-informed manner.”

Huddle, previously known as the Manitoba Youth Hubs Initiative, brings multiple health and community service partners together to provide easy to find, inclusive and youth-friendly supports to Manitobans aged 12 to 29 and to their families through a network of Integrated Youth Service youth hubs. Huddle sites are designed for and with youth and seek to bridge Indigenous and Western models of health care to better serve diverse youth and their communities.

The Winnipeg School Division and Huddle partnership pilot project will see a full-time Service Navigation Specialist located at each of the four Huddle youth hubs serving WSD communities: Huddle Broadway, Huddle NorWest, Huddle Ka Ni Kanichihk and Huddle South Central. The Specialists will be a direct link between schools in the division and the supports available at the Huddle youth hubs, helping school staff and students access services in six core areas: mental health, substance use/addictions, primary medical care (including sexual and reproductive health), peer support, Indigenous programming, and social services such as employment, housing, and other supports.

“We continue to see the impact of the COVID pandemic in our school community and its effect on student learning,” said Pauline Clarke, Chief Superintendent and CEO, Winnipeg School Division. “Provincial funding from the Strengthening Student Support and Learning fund means we are able to invest in our students by directly linking Huddle services with WSD school support teams in a key step toward breaking down the barriers many of our students and families experience in getting equitable access to these services.”

Research shows that at least 70 percent of adult mental illnesses have their onset in childhood or adolescence. A report by the Canadian Council for Child and Youth Advocates called “National Paper on Youth Suicide” stressed the need for mental health services to be embedded in schools. It recommends removing barriers to effective collaboration; situating mental health services within or connected to the school system; and that the school was the ideal centralized place for systems to operate.

The pilot project started in December 2022 and will run through to July 2023 with an estimated budget of \$240,000.

WSD was established in 1871 and currently has 79 schools, almost 30,000 students and over 4,000 full time employees. Its purpose is to provide a learning environment that fosters the growth of each student’s potential and provide equitable opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary for meaningful participation in a global and diverse society.

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