## A focus on adult well-being:

the need for a building a community of co-caring within a school

Presented by Catherine Korah, CEBM Coordinator
AAESQ Conference 2025



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## Why is adult well-being important?

- Needs of today's students have changed (increase in disconnection and mental health issues)
- Current challenges in education (numerous needs and complex cases, lack of staff and qualified individuals, loss and rotation of staff, etc.)
- It's not just about the students (importance of adult well-being)
- It's not just about having know-how (self-awareness and co-caring practices can go a long way in dealing with challenging situations)
- In education, we must strive towards:
  - taking a step back from situations Having a bird's eye view
  - > shifting the school culture
  - making room for reflective practices
  - > Being more intentional in our interventions and giving meaning to our work



# ADULT WELL-BEING What does the research have to say?

- Research demonstrates that teaching is a highly complex, stressful, and demanding occupation (Smak & Walczak, 2017). Educators encounter a range of challenges and stressors in their work, including responding to the varied needs of children, navigating interpersonal relationships and expectations of students, parents, and colleagues, time pressures, and balancing the requirements of the profession with their personal life (Herman et al., 2018; Spilt et al., 2011).
- Compared to other professions, educators experience higher levels of stress and depression (Reupert, 2020). In particular, educators carry a high stress-load (Herman et al., 2018), and are vulnerable to experiencing emotional exhaustion and burnout (Shen et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

#### What does the research have to say?

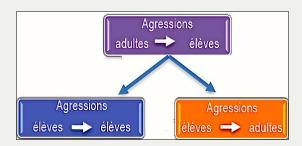
- An educator's emotional state influences how they think about and function in their teaching (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). A study demonstrated that poor wellbeing reduces educators' belief that they can help students with behavioural or emotional problems (Sisask et al., 2014).
- Educators' ability to develop supportive relationships with students, a key factor in promoting children's engagement (Kidger et al., 2012), is negatively impacted by educator stress (Virtanen et al., 2019). Conversely, educator wellbeing is associated with educators' greater commitment to and motivation for work (Collie & Perry, 2019), and job retention (Arens & Morin, 2016).
- These factors in turn affect children. Harding et al. (2019) showed an association between higher teacher wellbeing and lower student psychological difficulties.

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#### Relationship between adults and students

Based on a survey done in Quebec schools, researcher Claire Beaumont of the University of Laval found that the schools where there were MORE STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED NEGATIVE TREATMENT FROM ADULTS:

- 1. there were also MORE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS BETWEEN STUDENTS.
- there were ALSO MORE ADULTS WHO REPORTED BEING ATTACKED BY STUDENTS.



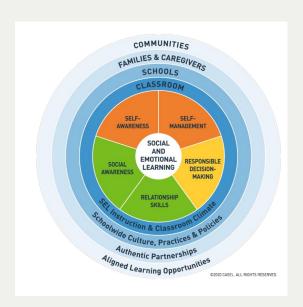
Beaumont, C. et collectif (2016). Ensemble pour de saines habitudes de vie relationnelles à l'école. Communication présentée dans le cadre de la Journée d'étude annuelle de la Chaire de recherche sur la sécurité et la violence en milieu éducatif, Université Laval, Québec, Canada

## What does the research have to say?

- Educator wellbeing is impacted not only by individual factors but also by contextual, relational, and systemic influences (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Cumming, 2017; Gray et al., 2017). Likewise, it has been suggested that the most effective initiatives to promote wellbeing in the workplace are those that seek to influence at both an individual level and a wider social or organisational level (Smedley & Syme, 2001; Smith et al., 2011; Tetrick & Quick, 2011).
- Although educator wellbeing has been defined as comprising individual and school-related factors (e.g. relationships with parents, students and colleagues, school policies, and school structures); however, the focus of wellbeing programmes for educators is mainly on the individual educator (Hine et al., 2022).

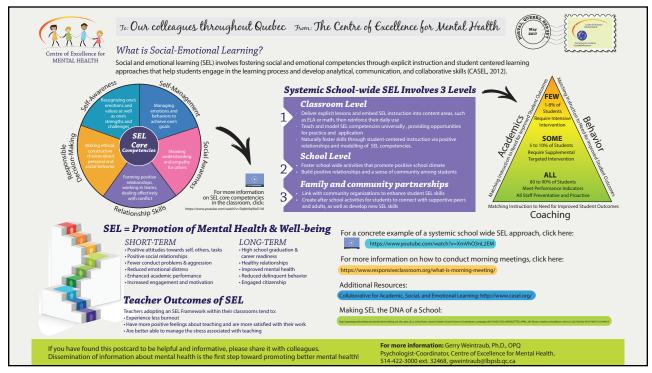
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## CASEL framework for SEL—applied to Adults



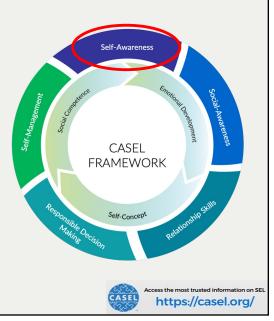
- The CASEL 5 framework addresses five broad, interrelated areas of competence and examples for each: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
- As we strengthen awareness of our own social and emotional competencies, we model them with greater intention in our interactions with students, their families, our colleagues, and our community.



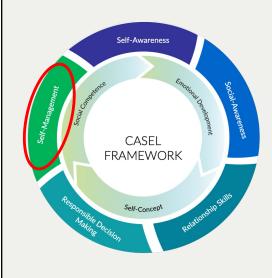


#### Self-awareness

- Labeling and recognizing one's emotions (stress level)
- · Identifying what triggers own emotions
- Understanding the relationship between one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
- Recognizing one's needs, values, judgments, and biases
- Identifying personal strengths and areas for growth
- Practicing self-compassion



## Self-management skills



- Regulating and expressing one's emotions thoughtfully
- Demonstrating perseverance and resilience to overcome obstacles
- Sustaining healthy boundaries
- Applying strategies to reduce personal and interpersonal stress
- Advocating for oneself and one's needs
- Using feedback constructively



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#### Self-awareness & self-management

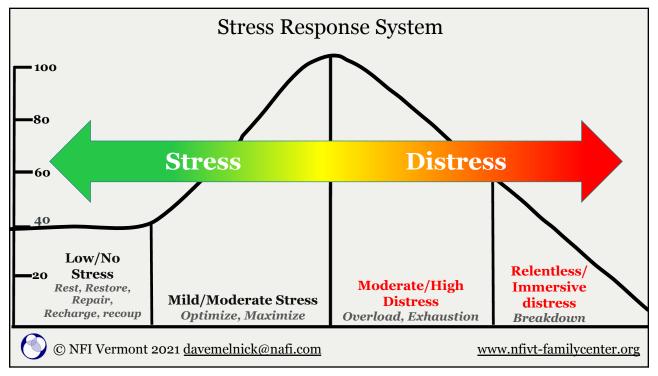
linking the CASEL model to the work of Dave Melnick

#### Regulating stress through:

- Knowing yourself (self-reflecting through mirrors, awareness of one's level of stress and type of stress response)
- Reflecting how stress and pain (within self) can impact and divide with others
- · Noticing and naming it: when you label it you can liberate it
- · Aligning with your values
- Making room for vulnerability
- Building resilience (protective factors, healing practices, connection, structures/routines/rituals, etc.)
- Addressing stress as community property (through communal care and leadership engagement)

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Vent

Blame

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Complain

#### How Pain and Stress Can Divide Us

- 1. Blame, Complain, Vent: These are natural responses to stressful experiences. They are survival reflexes, instinctual when we feel threatened.
- 2. We often need to find a **source** for our pain and stress, this provides a measure of control and agency. The greater the pain and stress the more we instinctually want to put it someplace.
- 3. However, like any response to pain, stress and adversity, these responses can become <u>habit forming</u>. They can become the predominant way we deal with pain and stress. They become <u>automatic and unexamined</u>.
- 4. When we excessively blame, complain and vent we limit our executive functioning, creativity, and innovative potential. We struggle to 'perspective take' and we often cannot take in new information
- When we excessively blame, complain and vent we create a divide between us and
- When we excessively blame, complain and vent, we create a divide between our thoughts and our feelings, our head and our heart. Often, what is happening internally/inwardly gets hidden or concealed.

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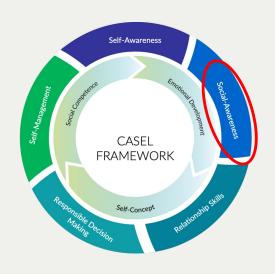
#### TRAINING: Who Takes Care of the Caregivers?

- Training facilitated by the Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management (Catherine Korah)
- Two (2) in person half-day sessions (possible online for smaller groups).
- Target audience: these sessions are aimed at school administrators and board professionals/consultants to build capacity board wide in supporting school staff.
- Format of the workshop: experiential in nature with self-reflective exercises and small-group discussions (participants have the right to share, or not share, what they feel comfortable with)
- Documentation included: presentation handout, participant self-reflection booklet, and other related resources and exercise sheets.
- Possibility for School Boards to get their staff certified in order to facilitate the material directly with school teams.



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#### Social awareness

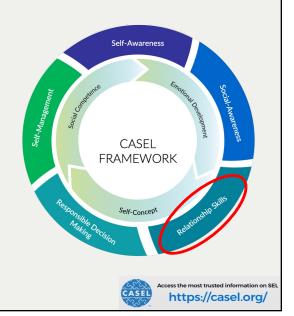


- Showing understanding and empathy for others
- Identifying social cues (verbal, physical) to determine how others feel
- Practicing empathy, including perspective taking
- Using reflective listening to understand and demonstrate respect for others
- Awareness of inequities and privileges that affect individuals and groups



## Relationship skills

- Developing positive relationships with diverse individuals and groups
- Practicing listening and communication skills
- Working cooperatively
- · Resolving conflicts
- Offering and seeking help



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## Dave Melnick learning series offered in 23-24 Hosted by the Center of Excellence for School Climate

Transforming Trauma: Building Sustainable Systems of Care

SWLSB + January 24, 2024

Dave Melnick, LICSW
Director, The Transforming Trauma Collaborative
Northeastern Family Institute, Vermont (NFI)
Fellow, ChildTrauma Academy 2017-2021





# What is a community of co-caring?

- Beyond self-care, the power of collective cocaring helps build further strength and resilience.
- The concept of community co-caring isn't to eliminate self-caring. Practicing community cocaring, in addition to self-caring, allows us to go one step further.
- Even if we're not like-minded, we can find that we are "like-hearted" in impactful collaborations where people put their differences aside to do caring work.
- Community of co-caring helps people create and operate impactful work in partnership.



## Key elements of co-caring

Ideally, a community of co-caring:

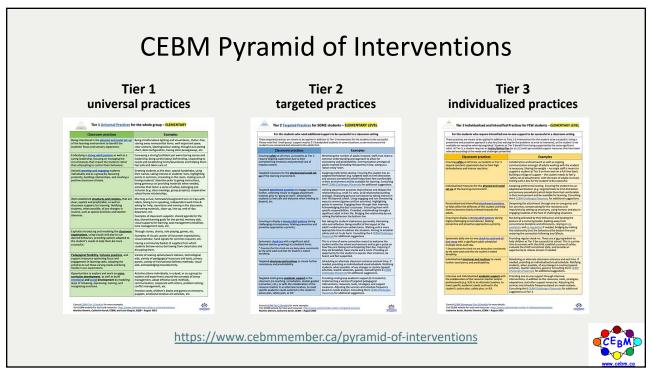
- becomes ingrained in the culture as a way of doing things, not just a set of exercises.
- is **systemic**, not piecemeal, where there's buy-in from all stakeholders.
- is **proactive**, not reactive, where we adopt measures to prevent rather than wait for problems to arise to deal with them.
- brings **people together** to support and encourage each other, and helps decrease stress, isolation, and burnout.

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#### How does co-caring apply to education?

- Practices based on teamwork and adult support (CEBM Pyramid of Interventions)
- Team building activities
- Reflection circles (discussing practices, student cases, etc.)
- Intentional staff meetings, Ad Hoc meetings, MDT meetings, etc.
- Ongoing co-caring support on a smaller or larger scale
- · Positive school climate initiatives
- School-Home-Community bonding events





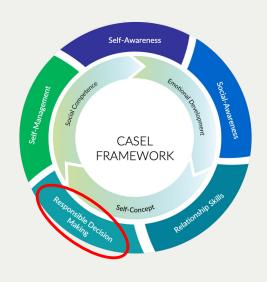
# CEBM Pyramid of Interventions Teamwork and adult support at Tiers 2-3

- · Student check-ins
- "You've Got Mail" system
- Foster Classroom
- Nurturing Support Centre
- · Emotions Room
- Targeted or individualized support for emotional and social development
- Accompanied or sheltered recess/lunch
- · Outdoor opportunities, involvement in special tasks or interest projects
- Adapted schedule (extra Phys. Ed., blocs of time in alternate spaces)



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## Responsible decision-making

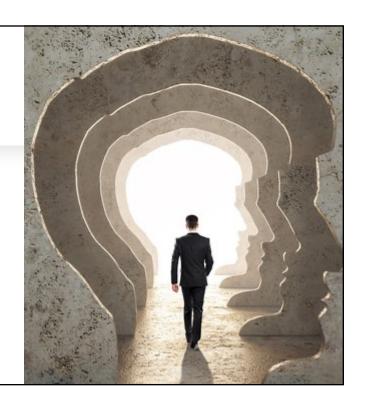


- Noticing and identifying problems
- Understanding the different aspects (e.g., moral, social, emotional, practical) of challenging situations
- Realistically evaluating the potential consequences of various actions
- Solving problems in intentional and appropriate ways
- Reflecting on one's own actions



# What are reflective practices?

- A continuous learning process where individuals reflect on their own beliefs, assumptions, biases, and actions as a source of personal development and professional improvement.
- Asserts that experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning, but that it is a reflection on what one has experienced that leads to learning and personal growth.
- Is meant to be about curiosity (not judgement) directed inwardly designed to improve practice and reveal blind spots.



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#### Reflective practices according to Dave Melnick

We want our school staff to read books and articles, attend professional development workshops, go to conferences, and acquire knowledge about others. Yet, looking outward will always be limited if not accompanied by an equally strong alternate set of tools. Where lenses help us see the outside world more clearly, "mirrors" enable us to see ourselves better. They promote gazing inwardly and internally. Mirrors bring greater authenticity, accuracy, and integrity to our practice and are necessary as part of any pro-equity work. Where professional development relies on outside experts, reflective practice leans into collaboration, internal wisdom, lived experience, storytelling, and conversation. When we are granted time to think and reflect, we inevitably innovate, change, and grow. To avoid this work is to support the status quo, and in the process, render positive change even more difficult.

Dave Melnick (2024) Building a Culture of Curiosity: From Lenses to Mirrors

# Dave Melnick learning series offered in 22-23 Hosted by the Center of Excellence for School Climate

#### Transforming Trauma: The School as a Healing Community

Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board + others MEQ 9/21/22

Dave Melnick, LICSW
Co-Director of Outpatient Services
Northeastern Family Institute, Vermont (NFI)
Fellow, ChildTrauma Academy 2017-2021

CENTRE D'EXCELLENCE • Climat scolair CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE • School Clima

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#### Daily questions of self-inquiry

- Inventory/Internal Systems Check: How I am physically feeling (health wise)? Level of stress? Eating/sleeping well? Etc.
- I wonder what was going on for me when...
- When I am feeling, thinking, doing this, it usually means....
- What did I just learn about myself when/during....
- Is there something (specific and attainable) that I need today to do my job better?



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#### Questions to consider

- Is there value given to both student and adult wellness?
- Is there leadership support towards having discussions on reflective and co-caring practices?
- Is there time and space allocated for staff to share concerns authentically?
- Do the staff feel safe, connected and comfortable within their environment to do so?
- What settings and processes are put in place to allow for this to unfold? Is it consistent?

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# Importance of establishing group norms for SAFETY

- 1. Role Modeling Risk Taking and Reflecting Process (especially by leaders)
- 2. Choice/Consent: "Challenge by Choice", self-agency. Right to pass, right to ask, right to refuse
- 3. **Discomfort**: "One more step..." Mistakes are welcome here.
- 4. **Equity/Inclusion**: All voices, identities celebrated here.
- 5. **Privacy**: What is learned here, leaves here: what is said here, stays here
- 6. Accountability: Impact over intent. Understand power. Speak for yourself
- 7. **Curiosity** is a central value of our relationships
- 8. Care: We all have a plan if a discussion becomes too evocative or painful.



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# Research project on Reflective Practices ATTACH framework adapted for Educators

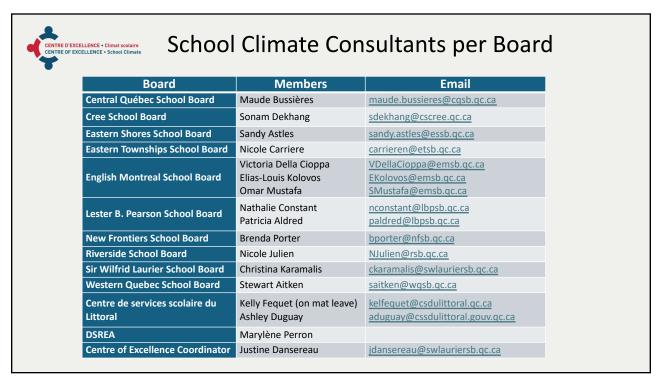
- The ATTACH™ (Attachment and Child Health) program is a parenting intervention designed to enhance parental reflective function (RF), the ability of caregivers to consider their own and their children's thoughts, feelings, and mental states.
- A three-phase project (2025-2027), led by Letourneau and Hart in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Mental Health, aims to adapt the ATTACH™ framework for educators, based on the same theoretical foundation. All English school boards will be invited to participate.
- The central idea is that promoting reflective function among teachers—helping them better interpret the behaviors and needs of students—can strengthen their emotional resilience, foster peer support, and enhance their capacity to respond thoughtfully rather than reactively.

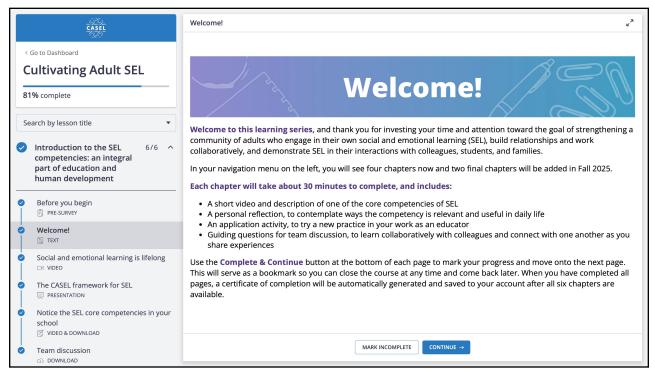
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#### Cultivating Adult SEL series by CASEL

- Project lead by the Centre of Excellence for School Climate (Justine Dansereau) and funded by the Entente Canada-Quebec.
- Six (6) self-paced online learning modules of up to 30 minutes each: Module 1 Introduction to the SEL competencies; Module 2 Self-awareness; Module 3 Self management; Module 4 Social awareness; Module 5 Relationship skills; Module 6 Responsible decision-making.
- Each module will include a summary video, downloadable resources that include a
  reflection exercise, a tool or activity for individuals to apply learning to their context, and
  a discussion guide for administrators to use with staff in-person to follow up after the
  learning experience.
- Each school, part of the 13 English Boards of Quebec, will receive one (1) free self-paced license, which can be accessed by a group facilitator (school administrator or other selected staff) to accompany the school team, for the duration of 1-year.
- Each school board has access to support for this learning series through their School Climate Consultant who acts as a pivot for the dossier.









#### IES and its Centres of Excellence

https://iesquebec.ca/

The Centres of Excellence are provincial resources offering support and expertise to the English-speaking Education community. There are seven centres of excellence (CoE):

- CoE Autism Spectrum Disorder https://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca
- CoE Behaviour Management https://www.cebm.ca
- Inclusive Schools Network <a href="https://www.isngc.com">https://www.isngc.com</a>
- CoE Mental Health https://cemh.lbpsb.qc.ca
- CoE Physically, Intellectually And Multi-Challenged https://coepim.ca
- CoE Speech And Language Development <a href="https://coesld.ca">https://coesld.ca</a>
- · CoE School Climate, Violence And Bullying

Inclusive Education Services also include the following initiatives: Community Learning Centres - <a href="https://clc.learnquebec.ca">https://clc.learnquebec.ca</a>, Intervention In Disadvantaged Areas, Advancing Learning In Differentiation And Inclusion, The Work-Oriented Training Path.