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**Sent:** 2023/02/10 1:14 PM  
**To:** Santos, Rowena - Councillor <[Rowena.Santos@brampton.ca](mailto:Rowena.Santos@brampton.ca)>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL]Mental Health in Schools

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Hello, Rowena,

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns. Given your roles as both a city counselor and parent, we are presenting two problems and proposed solutions that require different perspectives to properly address.

Problems:

(1) Schools are no longer just academic institutions. We are now academic and mental health institutions. Parents are increasingly looking to us to help with non-academic concerns. We are not equipped to deal with these issues; we need more supports and resources. We also need to align board, municipal, and provincial resources to effectively address mental health and establish a system to help families navigate and connect with the necessary resources. We were seeing a mental health crisis before the pandemic—now, it is much worse. Students will not be academically successful unless we address their physical and emotional needs. So, if we, as an academic institution, want to have a space where students can learn, we need to find ways to also help students and families address those other issues, too.

(2) Our school social workers are stretched too far to be as effective as they need to be to support our struggling students. They often support five-to-six schools; they should support two-to-three schools max. The board needs to provide additional social work staff at a macro level to sit at the table and discuss *how* to address concerns from a systemic perspective. In school buildings, social workers would be able to offer more Tier 1 work along with what they already do at the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels. At the Board level, they would be able to help all levels of education understand, lobby, and advocate for systemic changes--areas that would truly help families and thereby help our students. They are in a unique position to see the needs of families, students and schools and contribute to that conversation to address issues like poverty, housing, food insecurity, and mental health.

Proposed Solutions:

(1) We want to create a partnership between the City, Board, and Province to create an office which can support these various issues. This office would curate a list of resources/organizations to connect with families and advocate on their behalf, and act as a resource for schools and related organizations to connect with to guide families to the supports they need. Beyond acting as a resource for

schools, the office would meet regularly to address funding options for programs offered at all three levels, evaluate current protocols, and review individual issues to connect families with the appropriate agencies in a timely manner. To problem solve with the school social workers and effectively support the emotional and physical need of the students and families.

- (2) We need you to advocate for more money to be allocated for hiring additional school-based social workers. Not central board staff.

### Student Social Emotional Crises - Examples

The following situations are examples of what students have presented mental health and social crises at our school. Please note that there are several more examples involving self-harm disclosures and safety, for which we have followed protocol. The examples listed below are a sample of situations that, we feel, extend beyond our scope and capacity.

\*All student identifiers have been removed.

#### *Homelessness:*

-A Grade 8 student, with existing trauma and mental health challenges, shared that her family was being evicted from their home. This is a family of six school age children (another in gr. 6 at our school) and a single mother. The mother continued to reach out to the school for support and housing options. Despite connection to CAS, and a housing worker, there was an absence of options. The family eventually relocated to Hamilton due to lack of options.

#### *Online Safety:*

-A Grade 8 student disclosed to her teacher that she had been exchanging snap chat messages with someone they had never met (and photos involving nudity, we later discovered). She intended to meet this person somewhere in East Toronto. This is one of a few incidents like this, and, in this case, has involved an app called 'Wink', encouraging children 12+ to swipe left or right with individuals around the world, then connect via Snapchat. In some incidents, it is the parents that come to us to tell us what is happening and ask for direction.

#### *Eating Behaviours:*

-There are several students, female and non-binary identifying, in Grades 6 -8, that have disclosed that they are intentionally not eating during the day due to body image.

#### *Mental Health/Safety:*

-A Grade 7 student who previously disclosed suicidal ideation and a plan is now disclosing that he researches about specific firearms, mass shootings, and the motives of the shooters. He expresses relating to said motives and sees himself purchasing a firearm in the future and committing a similar act of violence.

*Gender Identity Issues:*

- A Grade 7 student who identifies to us as non-binary, with pronouns they/them, who has not yet told their parents, disclosed to school staff that they had been self-harming over the past 2 weeks, and displayed multiple deep cuts on her arms, and disclosed more on thighs. They also disclosed plan to end their life. Gender identity and previous trauma had been shared to be the primary reason for self-harm and suicidal ideation. In this case, in the process of meeting with family to share concern for safety, the student spoke of their gender identity, however in other cases, there are students who continue to keep this from parents, and we, as a school do not have clear direction on when/if we are to disclose.

David Yaciuk