

Transcript: A Mindfulness Practice to Support the Well-Being of Students with LDs – Feed All Four

[Music]

[Narrator:] Under the umbrella of mindfulness, Feed All Four is changing the way the school board views and approaches student well-being. Inspired by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the First Nations Medicine Wheel, Feed All Four is Trillium Lakelands District School Board's model for well-being.

The model uses four quadrants -- body, mind, spirit and emotion -- to approach wellness...and then connects wellness to teaching and learning.

[Heather:] Feed all Four basically takes in the First Nations Medicine Wheel and is based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. So we've split -- Feed All Four is four quadrants -- body, mind, spirit and emotions and basically the premise is that until students' basic needs are met, they cannot self-regulate, achieve...

[Narrator:] Think of something you do for your child, like putting them in soccer, swimming or track and field.

[Kevin:] How does that Feed All Four? Well, their body obviously through the exercise, their mind by learning how to play and learning how to cooperate with others, their emotions -- learning how to deal with winning as well as not winning and their spirit -- being in a space where they feel good about themselves and doing something that they really really love.

[Narrator:] Supporting physical, mental, social and emotional health helps improve resilience, self-awareness, self-regulation and student achievement.

[Laura:] I have found that my kids who are children with ADD or ADHD, they find the grounding and the calmness of it immensely useful. And I think that it gives them tools to be able to help themselves that maybe weren't there before or they were dependent on someone else to help them find that spot. We're encouraged to think of how we really do help ourselves maintain well-being on a daily basis and how we can do that for our students. And a lot of the activities that we undertake really intertwine so you can't make a list of just what to do for your physical and your emotional...a lot of them integrate all four.

[Narrator:] Emotional self-regulation is important for students with LDs who may experience emotional distress as a result of their learning disability.

[Laura:] They don't get taken away or run away with the story of their emotions, they let them arise and they recognize and let them pass. So they're able to really pull themselves together and to recognize when they need certain practices to get themselves grounded and centred again.



[Narrator:] Many researchers see self-regulation as a requirement for school readiness. Self-regulation is a person's ability to deal effectively and efficiently with everyday emotions, and then return to being focused and alert.

[Heather:] The research shows that focusing on social and emotional learning -- so helping kids to self-regulate, be able to express what it is they're feeling and giving them strategies in order to deal with those feelings appropriately at the time, like anxiety, are very helpful and also help achievement, not just at the young age, but also at the high school level.

[Narrator:] Developing self-regulation skills is not simple. Feed All Four helps students learn how to actively monitor their own thinking, to pause and check when needed, and to make their own decisions.

[Laura:] A lot of people think mindfulness is for calming down and I wouldn't want people to really run away with that idea as the main idea. I think it is -- to become more self-aware, but to become more aware of others and your connections with them and to be able to self-regulate and to focus your attention better. Those things you can come to through just a couple of minutes of breathing.

[Narrator:] You can Feed All Four at the individual, classroom and even school level. It's a comprehensive approach to well-being that considers the whole person...so they may succeed not only as a student in the classroom, but in all aspects of their life too.

[Kevin:] If there was a blank space for each quadrant where you could actually initially write down the things that you are doing and then write down the things that you would like to do to feed that quadrant, by the time you're done that, you can do it as a class, you can do it as a school team. A child could go home and do it with their family, you have an action plan.

[Narrator:] There are numerous ways to Feed All Four in the classroom -- many of which overlap. An activity for the mind may benefit the body too. Research has shown that for students with LDs there is a positive correlation between improved social and emotional health, and better school performance.

[Laura:] We do a lot of regular physical activity throughout the day so that it's never just sitting and not moving. You would think that mindfulness makes you more inward looking, and to a certain extent it does, but if you really emphasize the relationships, compassion, empathy and gratitude and optimism, it really helps them look out of themselves and work with others a lot -- a lot better.

[Kevin:] The teacher will direct the students to have a mindful moment. They may use a CD, they may have a Youtube video, they'll bang a gong -- you know, a little one. And then the students will go into their breathing exercises. A lot of students now use this on their own when they're in the playground and they feel like they need to do some self-regulation, they'll do that. They'll quite often do it, say before they have a big test or something of that nature.

[Laura:] I feel like every day the children have lots of opportunities to practice and to increase their well-being and resilience.



[Narrator:] Practicing mindfulness at school, as well as at home, helps nurture essential life skills that are beneficial for all students. Life skills including resiliency -- when you are stressed your problem-solving skills often suffer. But by being mindful, you are able to stop, think, consider your options, and then act.

[Laura:] So if they feel themselves escalating or they know that they need to get a grip on things, they're able to do that for themselves a lot more easily than they used to be able to. They are more compassionate and empathetic with each other, which has made an enormous difference. Really practicing putting themselves in each other's shoes and having a lot more patience and respect for each other.

[Heather:] One of the really great things though is that it applies to all students. So definitely there is certainly increased benefit for students with learning disabilities in engaging in a lot of these activities. It really has a benefit to all students. It's not specific to one group, which I think is great, because again, from a whole school approach it's not something where anybody is going to be segregated. It's a very inclusive, accepting model that promotes equity.

[Narrator:] Although mindfulness has been a part of Trillium Lakelands District School Board for some time, implementing the Feed All Four model has its challenges.

[Heather:] Well I think the biggest challenge is always staff seeing how this aligns with curriculum because there's always an imperative for them to achieve everything that's in the curriculum document.

[Laura:] As teachers develop their own personal practice, they can see the value of it and they're able to incorporate it or implement it more easily in their classes. I would say take it slowly, step by step -- start small. I wouldn't want to launch into a great long fifty minute lesson if you don't know what you're doing and even a few minutes, maybe several times throughout the day, would be great.

[Narrator:] The Feed All Four model uses a "whole person" lens to view and approach well-being. It helps educators reflect on their current practices -- how they're feeding all four -- and connect them to student achievement. Learning disabilities may go unnoticed because more prominent emotional issues mask them. With greater emotional regulation, teachers can make more informed decisions regarding accommodations for students with LDs.

[Kevin:] It can be a very powerful construct for a school or a classroom individual because it's a shared language that everyone understands, it makes sense and it's very, very pragmatic, do-able strategies for everyone.

[Narrator:] Feed All Four gives students with LDs the tools to deal with conflict and anxiety, to focus on the task at hand, and to advocate for themselves and their learning needs. These strategies are necessary for some students with LDs, but can be good for all.



For more information on the Feed All Four model and supporting mindfulness in your classroom, visit www.LDSchool.ca.

