At the Heart of the Matter Creating Classrooms and Schools that Support Well-being

Cindy: Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to LDatSchool's Fourth Webinar for the 2018-2019 school year. My name is Cindy Para, and I will be your moderator this afternoon. If anyone is experiencing any technical difficulties at this time, please call the number at the bottom of the displayed slide. After the Webinar we will be sending out the presentation slides, and a link to a survey to provide us with feedback on the Webinar. In approximately three weeks, the webinar recording will be available, and we will send out a link to all participants. For your information, all webinar participants with the exception of the presenter have now been muted for the remainder of the presentation. Once our presenter has finished her presentation, we will be opening up the floor for questions.

Over the course of the presentation, if you would like to ask any of the LDatSchool team a question, you may enter your text in the box at the bottom of your go-to webinar control panel, and choose to send it to the staff from the drop down menu underneath. The LDatSchool team is very pleased to welcome our guest speaker, Dr Sue Ball, whose presentation this afternoon is entitled, At the Heart of the Matter: Creating Classrooms and Schools That Support Wellbeing. The Ministry of Education has provided funding for the production of this Webinar.

Please note that the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenter, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Education, nor the learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. We will also be Tweeting throughout the Webinar. So if you would like to participate you can send us a Tweet by using our handle @LDatSchool, or the #LDwebinar. That takes care of housekeeping for this afternoon.

So let's get started. It is now my pleasure to introduce our speaker, Dr Sue ball. Sue is the chief psychologist at the York region district school board. Sue has previously spoken at the LDatSchool Educators Institute, and at conferences for the Council for Exceptional Children, both provincially, and internationally, on topics such as supporting students with learning disabilities, anxiety, and ADHD, and at the National Council of Supervisors in Mathematics on supporting students with LDs in mathematics. She is a member of the Executive of the Association of Chiefs of Psychology of the Ontario school Boards, and the Ministries Advisory Council for Special Education, also known as MACSE. Sue has an incredible passion for supporting all learners to understand their unique learning profile of strengths, and needs, and to advocate for themselves, with the underlying belief that all students can learn, and that every educator, and student matters. Welcome Sue, the cyber floor is now yours.

Sue: Thank you, Cindy. I'm really excited to be here today, and participating in this webinar. Sorry, just making sure my screen is moving. There we go. Oh my goodness, sorry about this. There we are, okay.

The learning goals for today's Webinar, by the end of this session participants will be able to understand why it's important to focus on mattering, and belonging at school, have practical ideas for promoting mattering, and belonging at school and at home, and learn 10 ways to build resilience, including how to support students with learning disabilities. I'd like you to imagine classrooms, and schools that support positive mental health, and wellbeing for all, where every student, and staff feel they belong, and they matter.

How would we go about doing that? We know from research that the schools that are most effective at producing, promoting resiliency, and wellbeing, embed those core principles of wellbeing, connection, mattering, and resilience in everyday practice. And they do this best through a whole school approach, which extends to the parents, the guardians, and the entire community. As we know, schools are the hub of that community, where everyone gathers, where the school is at the center of

the services, and supports that can be available, and where every child can be seen. And throughout all of these relationships are the most important things that matter, and are built through connection. What we do matters in our classrooms, in our schools, and our communities, and it's through this work that everyone will have a sense of feeling that they matter, that they count, and that every interaction become an opportunity to produce wellbeing, and promote wellbeing.

Mattering is a complex, multidimensional construct. There's emerging, and promising evidence with regards to children's mental health that points us in a direction of what mattering, and belonging could be. And underneath all of this, the construct is a universal human need to be significant, and to be connected with others, to have a sense that others depend on us, are interested in us, and are concerned with our fate. It's important to recognize that feelings of mattering can vary in different life constructs. Home, school, work in the community, you can feel that you matter at home, and not at school, or vice versa. And this provides a sense of hope in a sense. It makes it possible to have to make a difference to the construct of mattering.

No one likes to feel that their voice is not being heard. And when we feel that we don't matter, it can create a sense of not mattering, which can be particularly destructive. When we have a sense that other people are aware of us, that they're paying attention to us, that they're concerned about us, that they really are, they care about what we do, or they're concerned about our future, they have hope, that it creates a sense of hope for us. When we have a sense that people rely on us, and a perception that other people will miss us if we're not there, that makes a significant difference to us, and how we feel. Mattering acts, because of this, as a protective factor against risk. And that is very, very fundamental to wellbeing, because a protective factor when it's present can actually mitigate, and eliminate risk even when those risk factors are still present. That's why mattering is such an important construct, and why it makes such a difference for mental health, and wellbeing of all.

You know, from the research that students who, who feel better, do better. if they feel they've mattered to others at school, then that makes a difference in their

engagement, in their motivation, and how they do academically. There's less reported depression, and anxiety, and a greater sense of wellbeing when students feel that they matter. And we also know that anti-mattering is a very significant risk factor. Feelings of not mattering contribute to much increased levels of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal tendencies among young people. This is a very concerning trend, but the research has shown us very clearly that when we focus on promoting positive life promotion, when we provide kids, and students with the opportunity to build those positive mental health skills, and to have that sense of connection, and resiliency in everyday practice, that it makes a significant difference to their mental health.

And we know that these findings were very similar among diverse racial, and ethnic groups. Students can really experience marginalization on the basis of disability, social identities, faith, sexual orientation, gender, class, and ethnicity. And we know that a sense that our voice is being heard is essential to the construct of mattering. The same way that if a student is not being heard, it impacts their sense of mattering, this can impact groups of individuals who feel that their voice is not being heard. And for that reason, it is absolutely essential that we're address every single student that we see, that every student sees themselves represented, has a voice, feels valued and understood, that they feel that they matter, and that they belong. Mattering cannot exist, coexist with microaggressions, with a sense of othering, and with other forms of hate. It is essential that we stand together, stand up for all of our students, create inclusive, and equitable environments that foster a sense of mattering, and belonging for all. If we don't do this, we cannot create environments where our students feel a sense of mattering, of being deeply valued, and knowing that their community cares for them, and that they belong.

So thinking through these critical understandings of mattering, and belonging, it's important to reflect on what are the actions that we can take to enhance a sense of personal mattering, and belonging for students in our school environments. One particular board, and this is an example of the board that I am from, used an embedded questions related to mattering, and belonging in the school climate survey

data. And here's an example of what we found. 62, roughly 62% of students, endorsed that they feel that they are important to other people. 59%, and 57% in elementary, and secondary endorse that they feel that they matter to people at school. That may look like it's a good result. But it was very concerning to us, because we recognize when we looked at that, that roughly 40% of students are feeling that they are not important to others, and that they do not have a sense of mattering.

Now we do see those numbers increase at home, or in the community, but there's still a gap. And this shows us that this is something that we do need to be addressing if it is being endorsed by our students. We've also taken a look at through every student counts survey questions. These are anonymous, sorry they're confidential, but not anonymous. So we'll be able to take a look afterwards at trends, for students who are reporting that they feel that they matter, they don't matter, or belong whether they're treated with respect, or where they have at least one caring adult in the school who supports them. We can look at the impact on academic achievement, attendance, whether there are any suspensions, or expulsions. And also look at the identity based data, because it's essential that we can monitor, have a baseline for where we're starting at, and be able to look at the effect of the interventions that we're putting in place to support every student's sense of belonging, and mattering at school. We've also written this into our director's annual plan, with key actions that look at building safe, healthy, and inclusive learning, and working environments where students, and stuff feel they matter, and belong, and really focusing on building those positive relationships with staff and students to promote those feelings of mattering, and belonging. And developing key ways of look of being able to monitor, and address those key actions in the work that's being done throughout the board.

We know that mattering, and belonging is a foundational aspect of mentally healthy schools. That feeling of being important, valued, and seen positively by others. Mattering, and belonging are conceptually, and empirically related, but there are distinct elements that differentiate the two. They're both very important, and they are

both related terms, but they're not quite the same. We do know that having both produces a joint sense of protection. Why do we focus on that? Mattering is significantly associated with less perceived stress, and less likelihood of dropping out of school. Mattering buffers that stress, and it promotes resilience, and opportunities to develop mattering are recognized as very essential and important to positive youth development. Mattering is focused on an individual sense in the person themselves, whereas belonging is something that's related very much to the context. In that context, do you have a sense that you belong, do you feel that you belong, but it's not something that is within the individual themselves, that they carry with them no matter where they go. Feelings of mattering exist when students feel that they are being seen, and their voices are being heard. Student voice, and choice is a very key element. Are we reaching out to students? Are we asking for their voice? Are we giving them opportunity to inform us in ways that help them feel that they are being represented, where they see themselves reflected in the curriculum, where they see themselves reflected in the conversations that are happening. We know that feelings of mattering can be developed, and improved, and that's very important, because it reflects an aspect of the self that can be changed. This is the true nature, and importance of intervention. Mattering does not depend entirely on the reactions of other people, regardless of what is happening in the environment and with other people. If you have a core sense that you matter, that you are important, that is something that you can carry with you, that is something that you can, through self-talk you can reinforce. And that's something that where you develop a sense of self efficacy, and self-confidence, and self competence in your own skills, and abilities to interact in your world, that you can carry that with you no matter where you go. Feelings of mattering can be self-determined, because we engage in activities focused on the wellbeing of others, or making a difference in others, that itself will generate personal feelings of mattering. If we're involved in helping others, research has shown if we're volunteering, or helping others, it makes a significant difference in our own sense of personal mattering. So helping others helps us ourselves. And we know that mattering can develop across relationships, situations, and environments, and it's a salient theme across life rules, and contexts. So mattering, if we focus on mattering, and we know that we can intervene, and make a

difference, it can have a very broad, and pervasive influence across an individual's lifespan.

The supports that we give our students now will make a difference for them throughout their lives. I'd like to just talk just quickly about the story of a school. This school faced very major challenges, very complex student behavior issues, the worst attendance rate in the school board, very low test scores, the highest percentage of people living in low income households with the highest unemployment rate. Dealing with poverty, students who are racialized with a lot of mental health issues, and special education needs, and a new principle focused on the various essential concept of mattering, and connection, and resiliency, breaking assumptions, creating a culture of high expectations, and without providing excuses why students were not able to succeed. One of the things that were done was done was a big focus on improving skills, self regulation skills, stress management techniques, emotional literacy, letting students know that it's okay to be in a place that's hard. Helping them learn ways to express themselves when they're having difficulty, calming rooms, a focus on mental health. Students were given jobs. They were given the opportunity to be birthday greeters, or cleanup crew, or make announcements, or kindergarten helpers. They attended leadership camps, and completed volunteer work in the community. And at the end of the time period there was significant results. There was a significant change in disciplinary actions for suspensions from 689 to 88. And the principal was really clear that the consequences also had clear expectations. It wasn't that just that they were accepted, and connected with. They were accepted, and connected with, and also with limits put in place so that they would know, what was expected.

EQAO scores showed signs of improvement, overall attendance increased significantly, and at the end, speaking with the children, they indicated that they wanted to be at school now. They loved volunteering. They felt that they had opportunities, they felt that they could accomplish. Bottom line, the ultimate goal was accomplished, and that the students felt confident, optimistic, and empowered despite whatever challenges they faced. This is the heart of connection, mattering,

and resiliency. Some tips for promoting the sense of mattering for teachers based very much on what we've just talked about with this story of the school, is spending time getting to know our students, in the hallways, in class, in ways that are not always school directed, having fun together, having that little connection point, knowing our students well, that we can just have that little talk together, listening and talking with our students, encouraging them, and really importantly, expressing belief in them that they can succeed, that they can be successful. Setting those expectations, and consequences as are necessary, but providing the reasons to help them understand how their actions are linked to those consequences. That's what helps them to internalize with that sense of wanting to achieve, wanting to be successful, and knowing what they need to do to get there, and directly expressing, and showing that they matter, and to keep doing that.

These are really the same tips that are important for promoting that sense of mattering for parents as well. Working with a lot of students, and particularly with teenagers, the one thing that they say to me is that they don't often get the opportunity to spend time with their parents. And as much as it's important, developmentally appropriate to be independent, and to learn to be your own self as an individuate, and as an adolescent, as a teenager, they also want to know that they matter. They also still need that connection with their parents, or guardians. Someone to talk to, someone to listen to them, and not always being on the cell phone. Encouraging them, expressing that belief is just so important through everything that we've done in, and all of the research that we've seen. Again the same thing saying no, and setting limits when needed, and providing the reasons, and directly expressing, and showing that they matter, and keep doing this even when they get older, even when they're teenagers, even when it seems like it doesn't matter, even when it seems like they don't care, and they don't want to hear, those messages they actually do deep down, because that's what they say to us. Limiting the sense of not mattering for teachers, it's really important to not criticize, especially if there are fixed attributes that aren't changeable. Kids are so sensitive to tone of voice. And it's always really important to be modeling that appropriate tone of voice, and interactions with all, staff included. It's really important that consequences not be

arbitrary, and that there aren't social comparisons, because every student wants to feel, every person wants to feel that they're an individual, and that they have a unique value, and that they're seen, and heard, and not hovering. Because that contributes to a sense of not mattering, by not allowing them to make mistakes once in awhile. If they don't have a sense to build their own determination, and independence, then they're not gonna have a sense to develop that resiliency. You may have seen this meme before, but when we do the work for our kids, they're just learning that we can do it better than them. And I'm sure you may have heard of the story of the snowplow parents who, go, and just plow all the difficulties away, from the path of their kids, and what we're seeing, and it's out of the very best of intentions, but what we are seeing is for our kids, you know, when they're having an ice cream, and the ice cream drops on the ground, and they say that's the worst day ever. That actually may be the worst day for them. Because something happened that wasn't prevented, and it was an experience that, that they, that they faced the, the negative consequence of, now we're even hearing stories of, helicopter parents, and curling parents who, who are frantically moving in front of the child. And clearing the path, and smoothing the path, and making the best trajectory for them possible.

And what research is showing us is just how important it is. And it has to be within a balanced environment. But how children are learned to experience failure, experience that they can learn from a mistake, they can learn from a setback. And it's the way we approach those mistakes with a growth mindset, and recognizing that, you know, I made a mistake this time, but all that means I'll learn for next time, or I'll use a different strategy, that'll help me do better the next time. Those are the learning skills that help our kids develop a sense of resilience, because they have had that experience, and they've learned to overcome it.

In our board, we had the opportunity to focus on a resiliency project. The focus of it was to increase resilience, and wellbeing with all of our students. But there was a particular focus on students with learning disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities. And the purpose for doing this list to narrow the gap, because we saw a significant difference between, our students who have learning disabilities and mild intellectual

disabilities, and the general population. There was a greater number of suspensions, and expulsions, and there were greater amounts of anxiety. And we wanted to be able to really go in, and provide an intervention that would make a difference, build the capacity of our students, our educators, our parents, and our community partners in understanding, what are the factors that contribute to resiliency, and how can we all be working together to, focus on empowering, and bolstering those factors within our community? So our vision was to improve resiliency, a sense of mattering, and belonging for all members of the school community, and promote resilience in every child, but with a particular focus on students with learning disabilities using a whole school approach. So it was to support all students to build the resiliency skills, but particularly for students with learning disabilities, and to provide students with opportunities to experience care, and compassion, by promoting the message that they matter. And the same message for students that they would recognize that we cared about our staff as well about their well wellbeing, and their self care. And that was a significant part of this project in addition to reaching out to parents and guardians with opportunities to support their resiliency, as well as a resiliency of their children, and to give them the same tools, and resources, and common messages that we were focusing on in school.

Parents, and guardians would have those same messages. So there was wrap around support, and the messaging would be consistent. The same for our community members who engaged in the project, with the opportunities to engage in, and benefit from the resources, the training, and the support, and to have a multi-sectoral approach to change school cultures, and to improve our students' futures.

How do we build resilient school communities? We know how important they are. How do we actually go about doing that? Creating a community of mattering, belonging, and connectedness, that values relationship is an essential underlying goal. Developing students' social emotional skills. It was really important that we came at this from a strength based perspective. And if a student had difficulty in certain areas, and needed to address their skills, we wanted to be able to give them

opportunity to learn, and bolster those skills so we could level the playing field, providing students with opportunities, and skills to foster growth mindset, adaptability, a sense of mattering, and that very important sense of self efficacy, and to help students become better at managing the demands of school, and life, because stress management is something that will be a skill that they will have for life. So the five themes of this project, came from the research, came from the literature, came from surveys, came from what our students told us that they wanted, and came from what our parents, and guardians, community members, and our staff told us that they felt were very essential components of resiliency to be addressed.

Overarching, everything that was done was a focus on building those skills, rather than just addressing deficits. And central to the entire project was that concept of mattering, ensuring that everyone had a sense of what mattering was, and understood how essential we felt it was to be encouraging that sense of mattering with the students that we were working with, with the staff, the parents, and the community. Growth mindset. Understanding that if we don't have the skills at this point in time, we recognize that they are something that we can grow, we can learn, through the use of strategy, through practice, through the way that we talk, and think, and speak to ourselves will make a significant difference in our ability to grow those skills, whether it be in academics, whether it be in our ability to manage day to day, build our stress management skills. Whatever the skills were with that essential recognition that this change was possible, and it was something that we could participate in, and intervention would make a difference. Self-compassion, and self-advocacy. Understanding who we are as learners, and how essential that is. When we know who we are, what our strengths are, what our areas of need may be, and the strategies that help support us to become successful, then we're in a much better position to be able to advocate for ourselves, to be able to build a sense of self efficacy, confidence, and competence. Because we know that we can actually put things in place that will make a difference. And through all of this, having a sense of self compassion, and recognizing that mistakes are something that everyone can make.

Everybody can have difficulty at school, in their personal life, and interactions. And it's how we manage in those circumstances. It's how we activate the supports that we do have. It's how we reach out to the people that we have around us. It's developing those coping skills, and being kind to ourselves throughout that, that makes a significant difference in reducing the level of anxiety, and depression that we experience. And that mindful awareness of this is where I'm at at this point in time. These are the skills that I have to support me, that focus on stress management, and breathing techniques, and going for a walk, and learning ways to cope in the midst of various stressful circumstances that we found all of our students mentioned was very, very helpful for them, but particularly our students in secondary, as they approached exams at particular times of the year, they found that the focus on stress management, and the coping strategies was very, very helpful to them. And then self-regulation, problem-solving, goal setting, executive functioning skills, ensuring that our students are building the skills that they need, and that we're doing this in a way that demystifies, the need for supports. If everyone is focusing on this together, and we're putting these first line, positive mental health promotion strategies in place, everybody is gonna benefit for them. But particularly our students with learning disabilities, because we're giving them the supports that they need in a way that they don't stand out, and look different.

Everybody is focusing on them at the same time. So our key messages were that everyone matters. Everyone counts, including our parents, and our community. That it can be difficult at times for everyone. And that it's important to strive for excellence, but not perfection. No one is perfect. And when we're not focusing on an unattainable goal, we can all make progress, and we can all be successful. Being authentic, reaching out when we need help. de-stigmatizing the requests for support, and encouraging students not to hide when they're feeling down, and when they're feeling a sense of despair, but to reach out, and recognize that support is available for them. Asking for help when it's needed, and not stigmatizing yourself, or others. Recognizing that asking for help is a real strength. Why did we have this incredible, this focus on resiliency? We recognize not just from our own students, from the research that young people today are under way too much stress. Anxiety,

depression, and anxiety, and anger are far too prevalent. This is a survey that was done with students in high school saying that 73% of them are saying they have too many things to get done at once, not enough time to get them done. There's a real sense of worry or concern for the future, a sense of having to keep feelings hidden and inside. 47% of students are saying that, and finding school subjects to be too demanding.

So we want it to be addressing what our students were saying, and we wanted to give them opportunity to be able to reach out, to de-stigmatize that reaching out for support, and ensuring that the strategies, and the focus on coping strength, strategies was there for them. In a study with York University students, 43% of students felt so depressed at times that it was difficult for them to function. 46% of men, 59% of women had an overwhelming sense of anxiety. 45% of men, and 52% of women had an overwhelming sense of anger. So this is telling us that being stressed, anxious, and angry is something that's normative. When we look back to that school climate survey data that I mentioned earlier, it lines up with our students saying that they feel that, 40% of them saying they don't feel that they matter at school. And that they're not not feeling that they are important to others. So can we really make a difference when we see numbers like this? Like is a focus on resiliency going to make a difference at school? And we know from the research that students, their schools, and families, and communities can develop resilience.

The definition that we use for resilience was, very, very relevant, particularly when adversity is experienced. There are two components to resilience. First is the ability to bounce back, and overcome adversity when something negative happens, and the ability to adapt to new circumstances. These can be life transitions that, can be starting high school, university, or a new job. It could even be going from one semester to the next or passing, preparing to pass the OSSLT. There are all sorts of examples of when we need to be adaptable to new circumstances, and being able to develop the skills to bounce back, and to be adaptable, are two very essential skills that are helpful for lifelong ability.

So resilience was promoted in three domains, emotional resilience, which is really mood regulation. Can we bounce back if something happens, and we're disappointed by it? We're feeling really, really sad. How long does it take us to bounce back, so we're back at equilibrium again? Academic resilience, coping with failures, and mistakes. Most people are familiar with this one. They're familiar with that sense of being able to bounce back after a poor test, and recognize, well, you know what? I didn't do as well as I thought, I'll put more strategies in place next time. I'll go back, and get some extra help. I'll plan ahead and study more. Those are very, those are strategies that are easy for people to talk about. But we found that emotional resilience was a harder one. Knowing what strategies to put in place when we needed to bounce back from a setback, an emotional setback, or a disappointment with someone, and an area of research that is really not as well known as interpersonal resilience, and that's that social, and relational resilience. When there's been a conflict, when something has happened, and we see this on social media now, one comment can be seen by 500 to a thousand people at the same time, and have very significant consequences, social consequences. So the ability to learn that interpersonal resilience when there has been a conflict is so important. And that was why we focused on conflict resolution, as one of the skills.

So, yes, resilience promotion works. There's very, very strong evidence to show how effective it is as a prevention of not just an intervention. In a meta analysis that looked at 213 school-based interventions, there were very significant results that it showed substantial gains in not only social, and emotional learning, and ability to resolve conflict, and understand emotions, and be able to, access coping strategies when needed, but also actual school achievement. And this was even without a focus on academics. Academics improved. And as we've mentioned near the beginning of this Webinar, when kids feel better, they do better. And we actually saw the evidence of that. Parent focused prevention also makes a significant difference.

When parents are working to enhance, their kids' ability to adapt to stress, and beliefs about themselves, and their relationship with others, it helps parents as well, because it gives a sense of efficacy. Parents have something that they can provide

with to their kids with, kids do better, they feel better, and in effect, it also focuses on the relationship between parents, and their children. So it's a win win all around.

So the five themes we focused on, as I've mentioned, were the growth mindset, adopting the growth mindset through everything in the project. Having hope, and really emphasizing that possible, and the strengths, the sense that bad things can happen, but we can learn from them, and we can do better through that. Being a self compassionate, self advocate, someone who stands up for themselves, someone who knows who they are, and is compassionate to themselves, is aware of emotions, stress, and thoughts, and can regulate in difficult situations, cope, problem solve and set appropriate goals. And we recognize that growth mindset can be applied to beliefs about achievement, and intelligence, but also to relationships, and perceptions of the ability to control our emotions. So when we're looking at growth mindset, it means recognizing that we're learning, and that we're stretching, that we're confronting challenges, not just that we're making mistakes, recognizing that there are areas for growth, that there is opportunity to fulfill potential, and that we get out of things what we put into them. It's not just a focus on being smart, or being talented, focusing on working harder and recognizing that when we ask for help, it's a very useful strategy for growth. Kristin Neff is the researcher who has done most of the work on self-compassion. This was an area that she developed herself as a young mother who was having a difficult time managing her son who had autism. And she found when she was so, so critical of herself, that it made a difference to her ability to manage in everyday life. It made a significant difference to her stress. When she was able to be compassionate, and recognize that she was growing in her journey, and learning strategies, that would support her in her relationship, and that would support her son, it made a difference to how she was able to cope. It made a significant difference to her mental health.

So when we look at the research on self-compassion, we recognize that mindfulness is a very important aspect as we've included in the project. Being able to recognize when we're stressed, and struggling without overreacting. Being aware of this is a difficult time, and that's okay. It's a difficult time for everyone, and I'm not so unique,

and I'm not so different. So recognizing that sense of connectedness, that everyone makes mistakes, and experiences difficulties at times and they're not alone. And that it's okay to be kind to myself in these moments, and recognize that I will learn from them too. When we're supportive of ourselves, as much as we can be supportive of others, it will make a difference in how we're able to cope, and manage. And also the importance of student voice.

Students when they tell their own stories of resilience, it's very, very compelling. We incorporated this voice into our project by interviewing students, and asking them, what does growth mindset mean to you? How do you develop resiliency? What is your sense of wellbeing? What are some of the challenges that you have faced? And when we did this, we found that our students were able to really clearly articulate, a significant increase in their understanding of growth mindset, of self-compassion, of stress management, of what wellbeing meant to them. But the very most important factor that every student mentioned was the sense that someone believed in them, and believe that they could be successful. That was the major factor in that in their success, the critical aspect for them was that repeated message, and expectation that they could do it, that they could be successful, that they could succeed. And that's how they developed that sense of self efficacy, which is the various essential part of mattering that they can take with them in every situation that they are in.

Empowering our students was one of the most important predictors for resiliency, and predicting academic success. When we focused on what students could do, not what they couldn't do, when we focused on strength-based learning, having those high expectations, but also providing supports, and resources, and our students understanding who they were as learners, that is what made a difference, not only to their belief that they could be successful, but also our belief in them that they could be successful. And this was the very, the most important result that we found for our students with learning disabilities. This is also found in the, in the research from Michael Rudder, that this is the most, one of the most important factors for empowering students. The key beliefs, and understandings that change is possible. That we refocus on strengths, that accurate thinking is the key to boost your

resilience. Being able to speak back to those negative thoughts, and those critical perspectives, and say, I didn't do as well at this time, but I will learn for the next time. I'll use the results that I know will be effective for me, and reaching out to others when we're having difficulty in accessing that help is a really important key.

Relationships are the active ingredient underlying everything that we do, not just for teachers, support staff, and administrators, but for with our students as well. We are actually human developers. We are expressing care, and connection to these young people who are in our lives. But we're doing more than that. To develop that sense of resiliency, we also need to be challenging growth, providing support, sharing our power, sharing the opportunity for them to provide their voice, and contribute, and expanding possibilities. And we know that the way to boost resilience, the best way to do this is to focus on it through every interaction, every day. When our students have a sense of who they are, they have a sense of self. They know that they matter. They have a way of providing a meaningful contribution. Their high expectations are in place with the support that's needed. That sense of connection is there, that care, and the focus on developing the skills, we will boost resilience.

The messages that we provided throughout our project that made a significant difference were modeling and encouraging self acceptance, and self compassion. Everyone is human. Everyone makes mistakes. Focusing on process, not product. We are lifelong learners, and promoting that external focus. When we focus on others, we actually help improve that sense of mattering for ourselves. So we can matter. We can develop our own sense of mattering by helping others. Striving to do the best, not focusing on perfection. Recognizing that we can talk about our own mistakes as well, that no one is perfect, and model our own reactions to mistakes, and setbacks, so students can learn from us. Avoiding criticizing for making mistakes. Okay, so this was a mistake. Let's find a way to do it differently next time. Let's learn how to overcome this. And we actually found our students saying, you know what? Instead of saying this is too hard, they actually started saying, well, this is gonna take time, and it's gonna be, you know, take more effort, but I'm gonna get there. I'm gonna train my brain in math. Mistakes are helping me. I'm gonna figure

out how to do this, and move forward, and I'm on the right track. We actually heard students saying these messages to themselves, and that's the essential part of mattering, within the individual, the ability to change the key core messages will change that sense of mattering, and impact that sense of self efficacy, and learning step-by-step, goal directed persistence, executive functioning skills at what step have you reached today, you'll be able to make it, you'll be able to get there.

So 10 ways to build resilience is having that empathetic stance, having that care, and connection, and focus on mattering. That's what builds resilience. Listening actively helping to change those negative scripts that we've talked about, and helping our kids feel that they are special, and that they are appreciated, and that they're accepted for who they are. There doesn't have to be a standard. They can be accepted. I mean a standard is important, but they don't have to be perfect to be accepted. We accept them, and value them. Helping our students experience success, and recognize that mistakes are an opportunity to learn, and providing our students with an opportunity to contribute to make that difference, like the school that we spoke about at the beginning, helping out with lunches, helping out with the kindergarten classes, going out into the community, and volunteering, teaching our kids to solve problems, and make decisions. They can be more resilient when they have the skills to be able to manage the difficulties, the adversity, the setbacks that they may experience. And that's what will help promote self discipline, and self esteem.

It's very essential that we're supporting resilience in our students with learning disabilities. Even more so, it's essential that they develop an understanding of the nature of their learning profile to really nurture their strengths, and recognize the strengths that they have, and support, and promote interest in nonacademic, as well as academic areas. If school is hard, let's help them develop an island of competence. Let's help them have that sense of self confidence in situations that they can be successful in, that they can do well in, that they really, really enjoy as well. Offer a shift of perspective on school achievement. Give them that, give them the opportunity to be successful at wherever they can be successful. But to

recognize that it's not only about school success, that they are an individual, who has a life beyond school. as well as the school environment. And that's why the focus on community is so important. Providing opportunities to cultivate those relationships with others who can give that sense of hope, and inspiration. We've all heard of the research of the importance of the caring adult. It's important that there are people in our kids' lives who they can interact with, and learn from. And when learning takes place, it's so important that we're providing specific examples of what worked. So our kids are aware that it was their actions that made that learning successful, not just a lucky day, or a chance event, or a great job.

What was it specifically that made a difference? What were the learning strategies that, that were helped them to be successful in that circumstance, and paying attention to what those personal learning strategies were. Individualized learning strategies that students can develop on their own if they are successful, then helping them to come up with a strategy that works for them, and reinforcing that. Teaching the social awareness, and social skills for the children who need them, and helping our kids set, and achieve attainable goals. That's what gives them hope. That's what helps them plan for the future. By helping them to be successful, and to set those goals that they can be successful in is very, very important. So in creating safe, and welcoming places to learn, the key elements are having those high academic, and personal expectations, that engaging academic work, the instruction that's differentiated to meet the varied needs and most particularly, for students with learning disabilities, that individualized caring, support, and flexibility, and accommodations, recognizing their progress, recognition for their progress, and clear, and consistent expectations. What can schools do to promote resiliency? The most effective schools at promoting resiliency, and wellbeing embed all of these core principles that I've spoken about an everyday practice, where every interaction becomes an opportunity to promote resilience.

Everyday Mental Health Project is a resource that has been developed as a provincial initiative to enhance mental health, and wellbeing of elementary school students through very simple everyday practices that educators can easily embed

into their daily classroom life. This is an opportunity to take the learning very much the learning that we have done through this resiliency project that we've worked on with our students. This is an opportunity to take very, very similar, focus, and skills, to support students very, very similar to a DPA, an everyday mental health activity that helps build a sense of resilience, and wellbeing.

ETFO and School Mental Health Ontario are partners to create this resource that can be used to promote mental health in everyday practice. It's low cost, it's evidenced informed, and it's implemented in a very, very friendly way to support student mental health. Underlying this resource are all of the social, emotional categories that I've spoken about. Identifying, and managing emotions, relationship skills, growth mindset, optimism, hope, stress management, coping skills, self confidence, self advocacy, mattering, and building those essential executive functioning skills. Here's just a quick practice card example that gives you the purpose of the activity, who it's relevant for, the time that's required. It's like a recipe card. Very, very, very easy to follow instructions, and ways that you can use, and adopt this to strategies in the setting that you're working in. So I'd really encourage you to take a moment to check it out, and take a look at the resources that are available.

So to summarize, and to end, what do we know from the research that people need, that universal need to feel significant, to feel important, to feel that they matter is a sense of competence. That we can be successful, that we can contribute autonomy, that we can make choices that work for us, and others. That's what helps us develop responsibility. That's what helps us develop the key skills for being resilient, a sense of connection, and that sense of mattering. What do our students need? A warm welcome. We don't have to be mental health practitioners, all have to be mental health practitioners. What do our students need? They need a warm welcome, a smile. A chance to learn, a safe place to risk, a connection to a caring adult, someone who notices when something's wrong, and reaches out when they notice, who listens, who tries to find help. Someone who believes in them, and instills hope. And we know that our students with a sense of wellbeing feel nourished, well, active,

safe, included, valued, and supported at home, school, and in the community. We know that they're able to participate in productive activities. They can be more successful academically. They can form, and sustain healthy relationships. They can cope with adversity, they can be resilient, and that adults care about their wellbeing. This is when students are flourishing.

Excuse me. The same is what our staff need. What do we all need? Underlying all of this is what we spoke about at the beginning. We all have a universal need to feel that we matter, that people care, that people notice when we're not there. And that people will reach out to us. We all have the same sense of needs that our students have. And staff with a sense of wellbeing feel exactly the same way that students do. This focus on resiliency will support everyone. It's all about relationships, and it's all about mattering, and belonging. How can students helps do... How can schools help students flourish, or thrive? By being modeled by adults who are flourishing, creating these positive classrooms and school climates, explicitly teaching these resiliency, and growth mindset skills, and everyday instruction, developing family, school partnerships, and paying attention to promoting the wellbeing of all for students, and staff. We know that resilient principals make resilient schools. The staff love to work in those schools, and that students in those schools are more likely to be happy, and competent, engaged, and participating.

Resiliency matters. We need resilient students, families, schools, and communities. When we focus on resiliency, mattering, and belonging, we support wellbeing for all. When we focus on mattering, and belonging, we improve academic resiliency, and wellbeing, and we know that what we do matters, and makes a difference to promote wellbeing. This is the heart of the matter, creating schools, and classrooms that support wellbeing for all. I'd like you to take a moment, and just reflect on the information that we've talked about today. How will this potentially influenced the way that you interact with students, with your own children perhaps, staff, and coworkers, parents in the community?

I'd like to thank, a special thank you to a York region district school board. Our director, Luis Resco, our superintendent. I work with a wonderful team, who care very deeply about student's sense of mattering, and belonging, and creating, inclusive, positive, learning, and working environments. And the resiliency project partners, that we worked with, Dr. Gord Flett at York University, has an excellent book, "The Psychology of Mattering: "Understanding the Human Need to be Significant". And another very important partner that we've worked with is the Learning Disabilities Association of York region. And Lynn Ziraldo was very, very integral to all of the work that we completed in the Resiliency Project. So I'd like to thank you very, very much for your time, and attention today. And I'm happy to answer any questions if there are any.

Cindy: Thank you so much, Sue for sharing such rich, and detailed information. I think the educators... Woops, sorry, I don't think my slide, my screen is up fully. There we go. So I'll just start over. Thank you again, Sue for sharing such rich, and detailed information on how educators can support, and enhance student wellbeing in the classroom, and within the larger school community itself. So at this point in time, we're ready to move onto the question, and answer segment of today's Webinar. If you are not able to stay online for the entire question, and answer section, that's perfectly fine, as everyone will be able to access the full recording in a couple of weeks time. So if you do have any questions, please type your question into the chat box on your go-to Webinar Dashboard, and I will read your question to Sue. So Sue, I actually do have a couple of questions for you that came in during your presentation. The first one. What are your thoughts on educators providing opportunities for either small group, or whole class discussion on the topic of mattering, and belonging?

Sue: I think that's an excellent suggestion. I think it's really, really important, because it's when we understand the concept, that we can have the conversation about it, and as much as we can include this, and incorporate this in conversations that we have, the better. That's how we can de-stigmatize a focus on mental health, and give kids an opportunity to reach out, and be able to ask for help if they need it. So I think

that's a really important, it's really important. Obviously, whole-class will be a different format than a small group discussion, and perhaps a small group discussion, there's opportunity to go deeper, and to focus more. And it would also depend on the developmental, age of the student involved. But, I think that that's a really a great suggestion, and idea, and it could be, in the everyday mental health, resource. There are activities around mattering, and belonging.

Cindy: I'm really glad you mentioned that, because that is is a terrific resource, and it would be important not only to differentiate based on the developmental level of the student, but also age. I know that you mentioned in your Webinar that teenagers, even though they may come across as, hey, it doesn't matter, it does matter.

Sue: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. So there's opportunity to have many, many different conversations, but everyone has that universal need to contribute, and there's there's so many components of mattering, that can be addressed, and discussed, and applied to lessons, applied to literature, applied to short stories. There's so many opportunities for incorporating this within the classroom.

Cindy: Well, this is actually a nice segue into the next question. Sue, your comment, your message of mattering, and belonging is very powerful. I think this is important for the entire school community, including educators, and parents. How could mattering and belonging become a focus for the entire school?

Sue: I agree with you 100%. That was the purpose of our resiliency project, was ensuring that we were all having the same conversations. And had the same access to resources, and understanding of the importance of mattering, and belonging. This is something that we have focused on at our school board. As I mentioned, it's part of the director's annual plan. So, anything that we are doing, any initiatives throughout the entire school board is focused on mattering, and belonging, whether it's, curriculum, or student services, or plant, or HR. This is a focus for us. So, in the project, in the resiliency project itself, we focused intentionally on addressing our parents, and guardians, and community members, and having them part of the work,

and the learning that we did. So it's possible to incorporate it throughout. It is something that would need to be a systemic perspective, from the top down to ensure that, the information is being shared with everyone. But it is absolutely possible and, incredible results when we did focus that way. And as I mentioned in the story of that school, the results that they found, you could see what a significant difference it made for the entire school body, for staff, for students, and parents, and community as well.

Cindy: Wonderful. Thank you, Sue. Next question. There's a lot of discussion about resiliency. Why is it so important to focus on developing resiliency for students with LD's?

Sue: Oh, well, resiliency is a key skill for everyone, not just for students with learning disabilities. The ability to overcome adversity, the ability to manage setbacks, the ability to be adaptable to difficult situations, or even new situations that one is faced with. It's a key skill for everyone. But when we think of a student with a learning disability, for whom it may be just that much more difficult to show the strengths that they have, to need to be able to advocate for yourself, and access the accommodations, or the resources, or the strategies that will help them to be successful, it's a really essential skill.

I have some really exciting news, and that's that for our students in the project, we actually think that our students who have learning disabilities were more resilient in a way, because they focused, and knew who they were as learners. By the end of the project, they knew we had developed advocacy cards for them, and they knew these are my strengths, this is who I am. These are my strengths. These are the things that I have difficulty with, but these are the strategies that helped me to be successful. And they were broken. The strategies were applied specifically to their unique individual profile. And they were able to carry that advocacy card with them wherever they went. Their teacher had a copy of it, so their teacher was aware of it, and in essence, the student friendly version of an IEP. But it allowed us to be able to support them in knowing who they were, advocating for themselves, and we found

that that made a significant difference in their ability to approach situations. They weren't sure about how to proceed.

One of the big focuses we had was a transition project from grade eight to grade nine. So we had our students in grade eight, go to the high school in their grade eight year, and introduce themselves with their advocacy card to their new secondary team. That made a significant difference for our students in terms of their reported sense of confidence going into grade nine, less amount of stress, and a greater sense of their ability to transition successfully. So we saw it from the work that we did. Our students had a sense of who they were, how they could advocate for themselves, and because we focused very much on strengths, and on building skills, we also supported them in developing the executive functioning skills that were very important for them, to be able to develop, to be successful. Because often what makes it hard to be resilient is if you don't have those skills to be adaptable, to develop goals, to resolve conflict, to regulate stress, to manage your stress. If you're able to develop the skills to support you in that situation, then you can be adaptable, you can learn, and you can access supports as you need them.

Cindy: That's really interesting Sue, how your students in your school system with learning disabilities have really benefited from knowing themselves as learners, and really interesting to hear about how successful the grade eight to grade nine transition process has been.

I do just want to mention for the Webinar participants today that we have information on the LDN school website on use of the self-advocacy cards, and at this point in time, that is all of the time that we have for today. So we're going to end our question and answer session. If you do have any questions, please either email us at info at LDatSchool.ca, or use our hashtag on Twitter, #LDwebinar, and we will ensure that your questions get answered. Please also mark your calendar, and plan to join us at LDatSchool's sixth annual educators institute, which will be held next month on August 20th, and 21st in Mississauga. Registration is open, and information on the program, registration, and hotel accommodation is available on the LDatSchool

website, and on behalf of the LDatSchool team, I would once again like to thank Sue for her presentation, and thank you to all of our participants for joining us. Please remember that we will be sending out presentation slides, and a short survey following today's Webinar. The feedback we received through this survey provides us with important information for producing future webinars, and as a final reminder, we will be sending out a link to this recorded webinar in approximately three weeks. Thank you again for participating, and enjoy the rest of your day.