Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility  
Dr. Jean Clinton  
Well-being in Education: Overview  

DR. JEAN CLINTON: When I think of many of the concepts in education, well-being has to be one that every part of the system is engaged in and involved in. When we’re thinking of the well-being of children, we’re really thinking about it from the very beginning of their day to the very end of their day, both at home, as well as at school. Because how children feel affect how they act. And it affects majorly how they learn. So I think we all need to be thinking about what’s our role in children feeling well and doing well, and what are the conditions we need to create for that to happen, whoever we are in children’s lives.

So when we think about well-being, it really needs to be not a concept we think about bringing in a program to instil well-being, but we really need to have, right from the trustees down, a view of the child that says, when a child is healthy in their physical well-being, their cognitive, their social and emotional and their sense of self and spirit -- when they are healthy, they are going to achieve better. We're going to see better outcomes in terms of equity. But it means that from the trustees on down, we need to be thinking about that view of the child that says, this is as important in education as achievement is.

And so trustees have to support administrators in building the capacity and the infrastructure within the board to be able to implement strategy. So for example, we've got some wonderful, safe schools, initiatives and teams. Well, they're a natural place for a dissemination throughout the board, throughout the schools and right into the classes of some stellar practices that will build on relationship capacity, building connections between children. So it really is important that every step of the system, from the trustees, to the administrator, to the school leadership, to the classroom, to the student are all seen as part of a seamless system.

A great thing for teachers to be thinking about is, how do I create in the everyday moments a mentally healthy classroom? I think in Ontario, we're very lucky to have Kathy Short and the School Mental Health ASSIST really working very hard to see, along with some of the unions, to see how can we support teachers in creating those everyday moments of well-being? And what, to me, as a child psychiatrist, the heart of that matter is the relationship. It's how does the teacher and the student connect, so that there is a sense of belonging, a sense that the child is valued for their own unique voice? So we need to help teachers with strategies to do that.

We heard a beautiful presentation here the other day by a group of students, and one young fellow was talking about the power of a smile. That when the teacher
smiles and knows your name, they're creating the weather in that classroom. So I think it's really important that we help teachers recognize, they're creating the weather. We all know how we feel on a grey day, and if a teacher comes in with a frown, that's going to affect the kids.

So I think we need to really be thinking about supporting what teachers went into teaching for in the first place, and balance that against the demands that they have on the day-to-day from a curricular or other responsibility.