

## **Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility**

**Stephanie Fearon**

### **Well-being: A Collective Responsibility**

STEPHANIE FEARON: Well-being is a collective responsibility because the school system doesn't hold it alone. Schools, we say at the Toronto District School Board that the school is the heart of the community, and if the school is truly the heart of the community, that means it's not divorced from it. It's not standing by itself. So, in the schools that I work with, we connect with healthcare professionals. We have paediatric clinics in some of our schools. We connect with community organisations to ensure that some of our middle schools are open until 8:00 p.m. to provide those safe spaces for our students. We connect with nurse practitioners. We connect with social workers. We connect with the lunchroom supervisors, the crossing guards. We connect with all the stakeholders because we know that in order to really, truly nurture and safeguard the well-being of a child, it's wraparound support, and this support should not just stop at the doors of the school, but it extends outside into the community. I think we need to talk and share with one another. Right now, I'm seeing the need for different schools to talk and speak with different schools, with each other, with school boards to share ideas, with the Ministry to help us and support us, which they have. So, we're on the right track, but I also really think that as a school system and as a classroom teacher, I need to say to myself that I can't do it alone. I need to work with families. I need to work with communities as well. And not in a way where I'm trying to teach them to do better. In a way where I acknowledge that these different stakeholders hold valid and valuable information and knowledge, and that knowledge can support my work within the classroom. I work with kindergarten students and already we're starting to talk about all those barriers that exist in the community and how it does exist and impact learning, and how we feel about one another and ourselves inside the classroom. These are topics that we shouldn't shy away from and pretend they don't exist, and again, we know from the research, we know from the data, that these barriers that exist outside of the community exist as well within the schools. I believe that our first step is to acknowledge it and to really integrate it into what and how we're teaching in the classroom. We can talk about poverty at the kindergarten level. We should talk about sexism in grade four. We should talk about racism in our middle schools, in our high schools, at all age levels. This is what's happening in the world. We should not pretend it doesn't exist. We need to bring it into our classrooms and make it a part of our day-to-day teaching.