

Director's Dispatch

PATHWAYS TO THRIVE

Fall 2018

Throughout the course of my entire career as an educator, the importance of relationships has been a fundamental aspect of our collective work with students, staff and school communities. In an increasingly complex, fast-paced, globalized age, this may perhaps be more essential now than ever before in public education.

A 'public advisory' produced by the [Council of Ontario Directors of Education](#), emphasizes relationship building as a key element of the complementary connection between effective schools and public confidence by sharing that "building trust is dependent on building positive relationships with people inside and outside the school – employees, parents, and business and community leaders" (Council of Ontario Directors of Education Advisory No.21: *Building Confidence in Public Education*, January 2012).

Further, as noted in a special edition of the Ministry of Education's [Capacity Building Series](#) focused on the topic of student engagement "developing reciprocal relationships – with students, parents and colleagues – is critical for sharing ownership for learning" (*Capacity Building Series: Special Edition #34, Student Voice: Transforming Relationships*, Ministry of Education Ontario, September 2013).



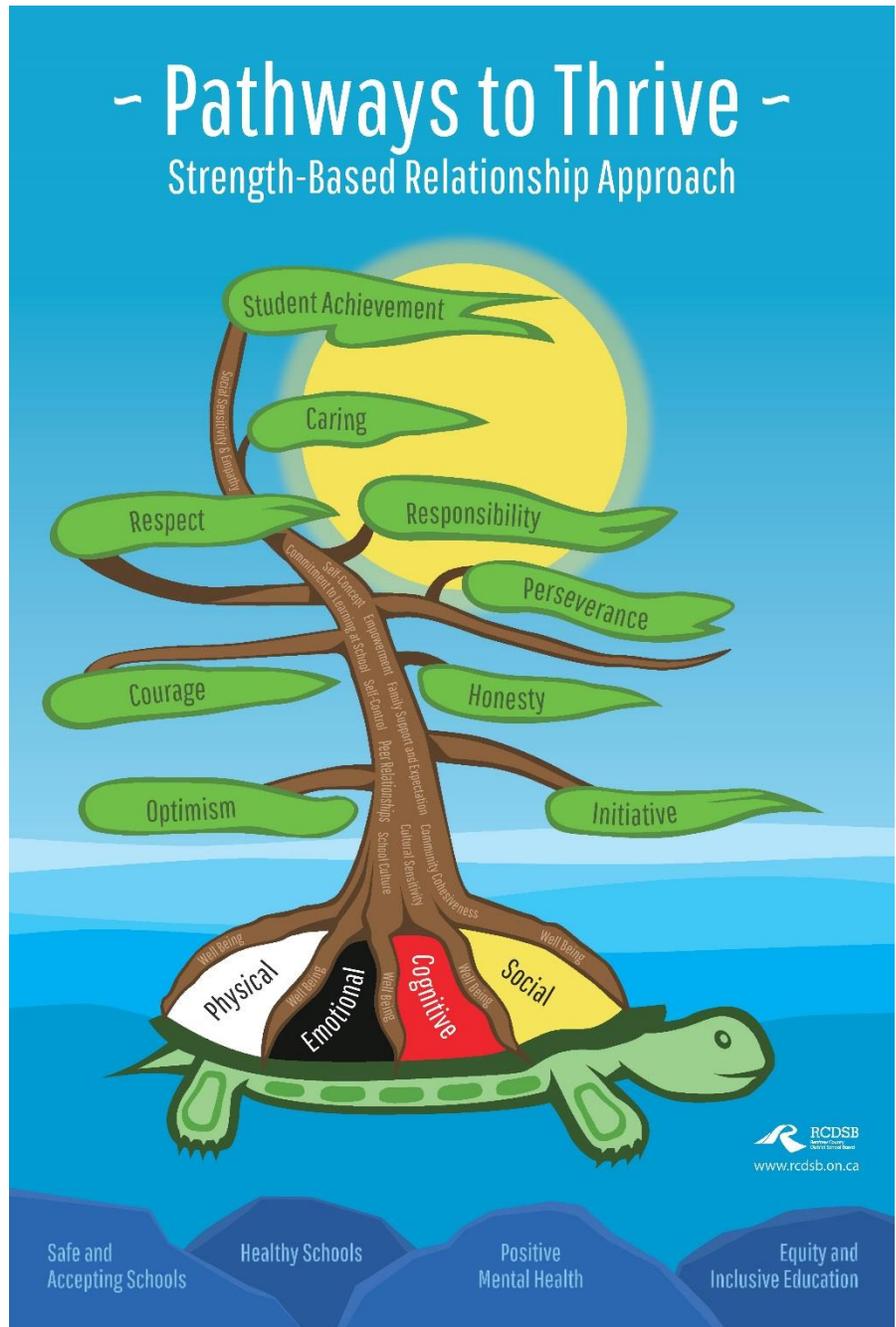
Educators across Ontario are taking action to transform relationships in their own classrooms and schools by...“connecting the whole school community, fostering reciprocal relationships with students, and, co-creating a responsive learning environment.” ~ Watkins (2012) in *Capacity Building Series: Special Edition #34, Student Voice: Transforming Relationships*, Ministry of Education Ontario (September 2013).

As Chief Education Officer of the Renfrew County District School Board, I am excited to share that our District recently launched the 'Pathways to Thrive' Framework, system-wide, in recognition of the important role relationship building plays throughout our organization. A strength-based relationship approach developed by the RCDSB's Character Development Team, the framework is intended to support the development of foundational building blocks for character and resiliency.

The image depicted in the framework is based upon an Indigenous creation story, *Turtle Island*. The story speaks of all living creatures working together to create the Earth on the back of a turtle at the time when Sky Woman fell. The tree in the centre of the image showcases the District's character values, as well as ten internal and external protective factors identified as crucial to the achievement and well-being of our students. The framework is inspired by the research of Dr. Wayne Hammond, President and Executive Director of Onboard Education.

The development of the framework aligns with a number of key actions of the [RCDSB 2017-2020 Strategic Plan](#) related to the guiding principles of 'Excellence in Teaching and Learning', 'Safe, Caring, Inclusive and Respectful Environments', and 'Wise Use of

Resources', including the development of our understanding of (and response to) the factors that affect well-being so that truly active minds and bodies can be fully engaged in teaching



[Click the poster to watch the video](#)

and learning. The framework is also woven seamlessly into the action plan for Year II of the District's [strategy](#) for mental health and well-being.

As we endeavour to continue to build positive relationships in our schools and school communities, members of staff are being encouraged to view school culture and school success through this rejuvenated lens. Most specifically, the framework will become an integral part of our schools' improvement planning processes...with each school reviewing both qualitative and quantitative data from school climate surveys in order to celebrate strengths and identify areas for growth; develop specific, measurable, timely goals for improvement; and, monitor the impact of their actions related to the established goals throughout the school year. Of note, educators will have many opportunities to embed components of the framework into their curriculum planning, such as language lessons related social justice and group discussions regarding aspects of positive mental health, for instance.

“Rather than the traditional perspective of engaging a person with a problem orientation and risk focus, a strength-based approach seeks to understand and develop the strengths and capabilities that can transform the lives of people in positive ways.” ~ Wayne Hammond and Rob Zimmerman, *A Strength-Based Perspective*, Resiliency Initiatives, 2009.

I am very confident that a focus on building relationships and promoting the protective factors shared in the framework above will lead to an increase in engagement, resiliency, character development, and ultimately, the achievement and well-being of our students, staff and school communities. I look forward to learning alongside each and every one of you through this strength-based relationship approach.

Sincerely,



Pino Buffone

Director of Education