

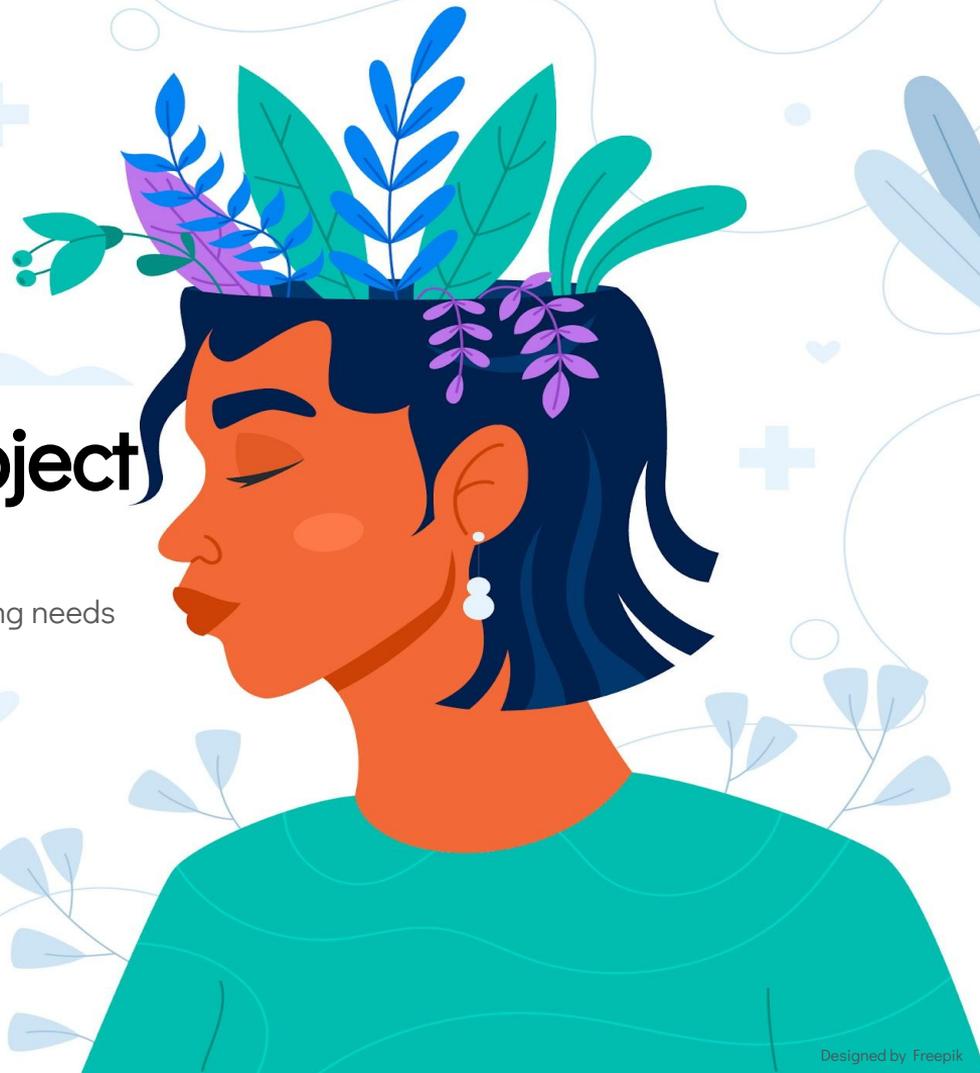
Mental Health Pilot Project

Executive Functioning Skills & Emotional Regulation

Supporting the MH needs of students with neurodiverse learning needs



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Wood Buffalo
Mental health for all



Fort McMurray Public School Division (FMPSD) & Fort McMurray Catholic School Division (FMCS)



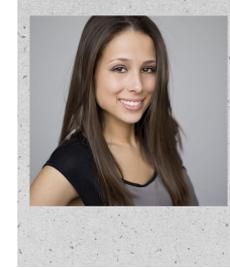
- North Eastern Alberta in the RMWB
- 13,500 students, 29 schools
- Relatively young population
- The most culturally diverse community in Canada (per Capita), with more than 60 languages spoken by our families
- Enrollment has grown by 27% in the past year
- Mental Health impacts have been astronomical: 2016 wildfire, COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 Flood, and the most recent evacuation due to wildfire in May of 2024.
- 2 Priorities:
 - 1. Promoting Growth and Success for All Students
 - 2. Maintain Safe and Caring Learning Environments for All Mental Health and Dysregulation rates are on track to be higher in 2023-2024 than that of the COVID pandemic years. Students with complex needs have increased by 50% in the past two years.



Cynthia Shelley
Director of Inclusive Learning



Mellanie Fraser
Mental Health Supervisor



Robyn Kuseler
Executive Function Support Teacher



Valerie Dyck
Director of Inclusive Education



Sherri Bennett
Mental Health Worker



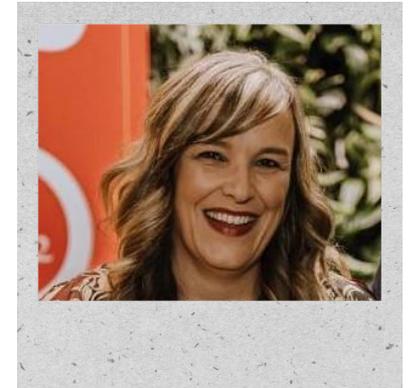
Autism Society of The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB)



- The Autism Society of the RMWB strives to create an inclusive community through programs that support and respect neurodiverse individuals of all ages in our community
- Our focus during this project was to support neurodiverse youth to increase their executive functioning skills through a variety of activities during regular programs
- Programs offered during Mental Health Pilot Project:
 - Friday Friends - PEERS (Program for the Enrichment of Relational Skills)
 - Social-Respite Program

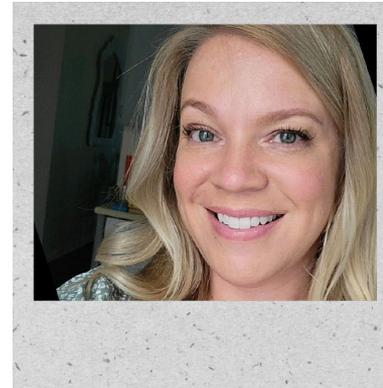


Tina Delainey
Executive Director



Paula Bowen
Program Director

- CMHA Wood Buffalo interacted with approximately 485 people in a caregiving role
- CMHA Wood Buffalo provides services and facilitates access to the resources people require to maintain and improve mental health
- Our focus was on caregivers during this project.
 - Adult dysregulation largely impacts the children and youth they support and care for
- Programs offered:
 - Circle of Connection
 - One on One Sessions
 - Recovery College



Krista Anthony
Mental Health Coordinator



Jodi Collins
Family Peer Coordinator



Applying for Mental Health Pilot Grant

- Students are more dysregulated than ever
- Gap in mental health support for students with neuro-diverse learning needs
- Target approximately 550 students who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other neuro-diverse complexities
- The neuro-diverse student population is a particularly socially vulnerable group of students that were experiencing a high risk of anxiety, depression and mental illness even before the onset of COVID-19
- The Regulated Classroom © framework is a foundation for student/youth and adult co-regulation so that executive function skill development could take place
- Obvious Community Partners included those who also serve the students with mental health and neurodiverse needs; therefore, the CMHA and the Autism Society of the RMWB were approached to join us along this journey





Mental Health Pilot Project - How it Began

LQS 3 - Embodying Visionary Leadership

A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being.

c. collaborating with other leaders and superintendents to address challenges and priorities;

e. promoting innovation, enabling positive change and fostering commitment to continuous improvement; and

f. accessing, sharing and using a range of data to determine progress towards achieving goals.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING - WHAT IS IT?

- Executive function skills are controlled by the prefrontal cortex of the brain.
- Everyone has executive function strengths and weaknesses.
- When executive function skills are weak, individuals can struggle with emotional regulation, relationships and school.
- Executive function skills are learned. With practice and support, everyone can improve these skills.
- We are not born with these skills, they develop naturally through practice and mature in our mid-20s.

12 KEY EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

1. **Response Inhibition** - The ability to think before you act.
2. **Working Memory** - The ability to recall information when completing a task.
3. **Emotional Control** - The ability to appropriately manage one's own feelings.
4. **Cognitive Flexibility** - The brain's ability to adapt to new, changing, or unplanned events.
5. **Sustained Attention** - The ability to focus on an activity over a long period of time.
6. **Task Initiation** - The ability to begin a project in an efficient and timely manner.
7. **Planning and Prioritizing** - The ability to put first things first and plan accordingly.
8. **Organization** - The way one arranges their physical and mental environments.
9. **Time Management** - The ability to plan accordingly and use time wisely.
10. **Goal-Directed Persistence** - The ability to complete a goal without distractions.
11. **Metacognition** - The process of thinking about one's own thinking and learning.
12. **Stress Tolerance** - The ability to be relaxed and composed when faced with difficulty.



Paik, L., Bakh, C.-A., & Dawson, P. (2022). Executive function skills in the classroom: Overcoming barriers, building strategies. The Guilford Press.

MENTAL HEALTH & EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING COLLABORATION



The goal of this project is to help educators, students and parents understand the importance of executive functioning skills and how they correlate with mental health. The development of executive functioning skills positively impacts an individual's mental well-being.

This support will be delivered through the services of the staff at FMPSD, FMCSO, the Autism Society of RMWB and CMHA.





Mental Health Pilot Project - How it Began

FMPSD/FMCSD Pre-Assessment: Mental Health/Executive Functioning

Because executive skills are needed in everything we do, poor executive function can lead to feelings of distress and possibly have an impact on mental health and well being. We want to establish a baseline of how you think the **individual being referred** is feeling prior to acquiring the skills/tools provided to you by the Executive Function Teacher. Please complete a pre-assessment for **each** child that will be referred. Please complete the referral form after completing this form.

In order to maintain the validity and reliability of this assessment, the staff member must report based on what is **strictly observed**.

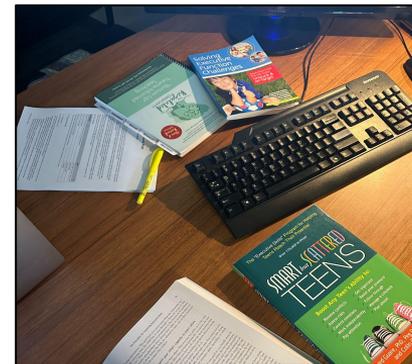
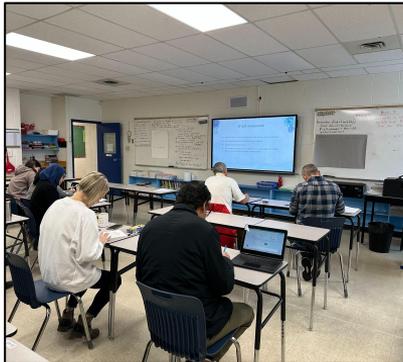
Note: This Pre-Assessment needs to be done for each individual referred.

FMPSD/FMCSD Executive Function Support Teacher Referral

The role of the Executive Function Support Teacher is to support teachers, students, and parents build their capacity and skills to self-regulate and co-regulate within their environments. As well as support increased awareness of executive functioning skills and provide strategies to enhance these skills.

In order to start the process of the Executive Functioning Teacher's support, there needs to be some preliminary work completed. We will be expecting that the LAC (with the teacher) complete the [Mental Health/Executive Function Pre-Assessment Form](#) before submitting a referral. This will allow us to collect data to indicate the impact of this position.

A referral needs to be made for **each** student you are requesting support for. Support will take place in the classroom setting. This is to ensure that other students will benefit and be exposed to a variety of new strategies.





Mental Health Pilot Project - Implementation

LQS 6 - Providing Instructional Leadership

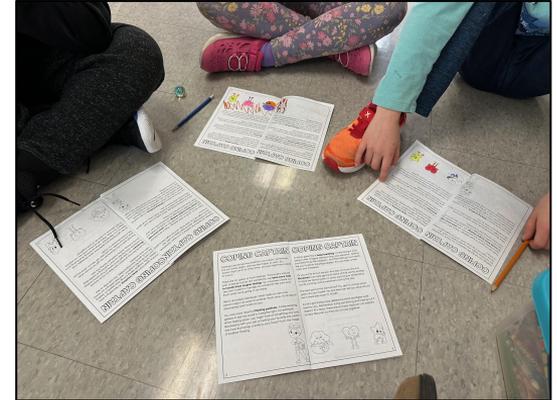
A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

- a. building the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of students





Mental Health Pilot Project - Implementation



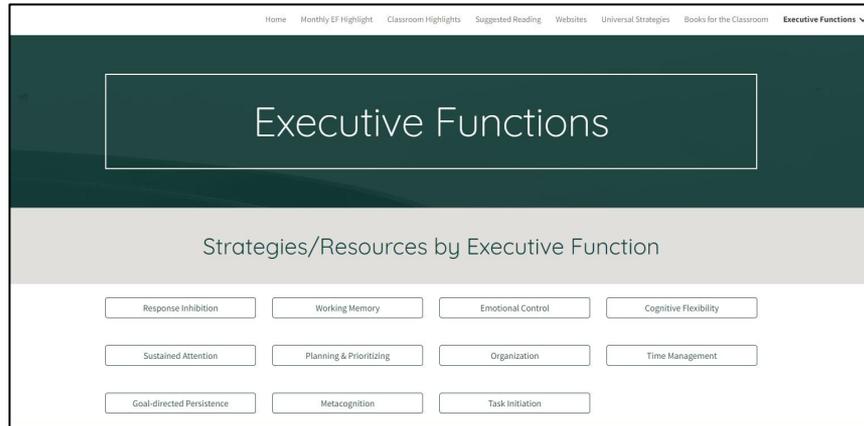


Mental Health Pilot Project - Implementation

SLQS 4 - Leading Learning

A superintendent establishes and sustains a learning culture in the school community that promotes ongoing critical reflection on practice, shared responsibility for student success and continuous improvement.

e. ensuring that staff have access to resources, programs and expertise to support them in meeting their professional responsibilities and in addressing the learning needs of all students



The infographic is titled 'EXECUTIVE FUNCTION HIGHLIGHT: EMOTIONAL CONTROL' and is dated 'NOVEMBER 2023'. It features the Fort McMurray Public Schools logo in the top left. The main text defines emotional control as 'The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior' (Faith et al, 2022, p.2). It lists 'Challenges can look like:' such as difficulty regulating emotions, nervousness, and conflict. It also lists 'Strategies to support emotional control:' including talking about feelings, breathing techniques, and mindfulness. Three circular images illustrate these concepts: a person meditating, a person looking up, and a child playing with a ball.

Fort McMurray Public Schools

NOVEMBER 2023

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION HIGHLIGHT:
EMOTIONAL CONTROL

"The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior" (Faith et al, 2022, p.2).

Challenges can look like:

- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Nervousness when taking risks
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Outbursts
- Conflict with others
- Difficulty accepting feedback

Strategies to support emotional control:

- Explicitly talk about feelings & emotions
- Practice breathing techniques
- Imaginary play
- Zones of Regulation
- The Regulated Classroom
- Cool down/calming zone
- Fidgets
- Sensory play
- Teach mindfulness meditation
- Model positive self-talk
- Participate in movement activities (e.g. yoga, walking)

Faith, L., Bush, C.-A., & Dawson, P. (2022). Executive function skills in the classroom: Overcoming barriers, building strategies. The Guilford Press.



Mental Health Pilot Project - End of 1st Year

SLQS 3 - Visionary Leadership

A superintendent engages with the school community in implementing a vision of a preferred future for student success, based on common values and beliefs.

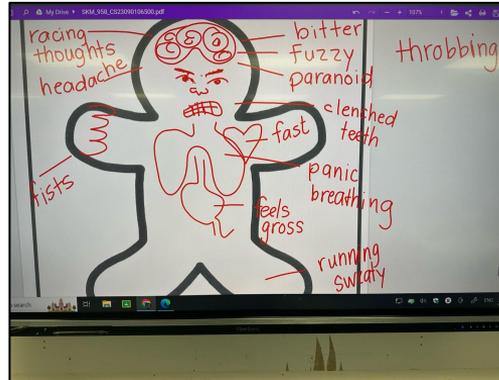
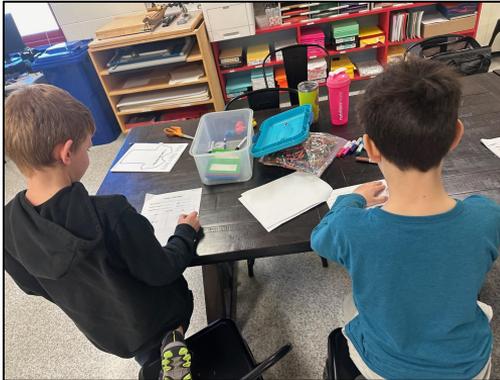
- b. promoting innovation and continuous improvement by building structures and developing strategies to support staff in professional collaboration





Mental Health Pilot Project - Successes

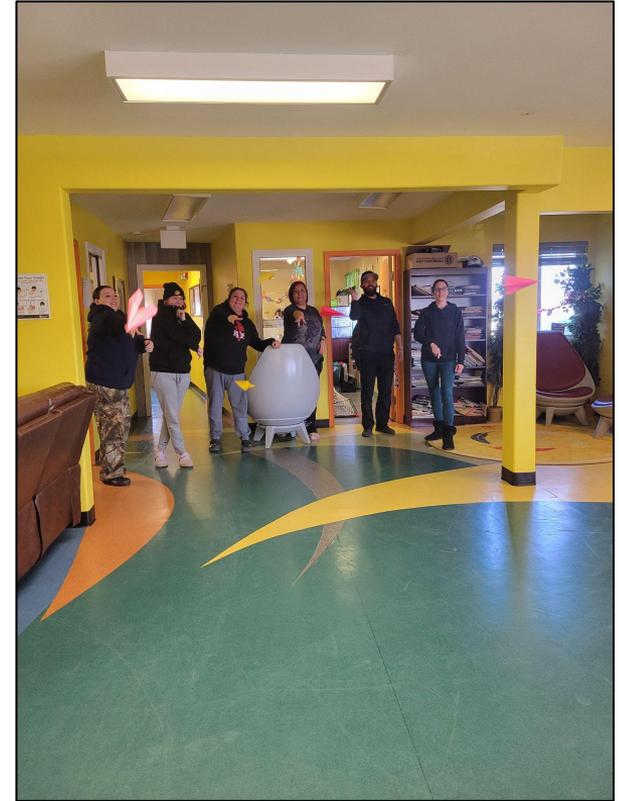
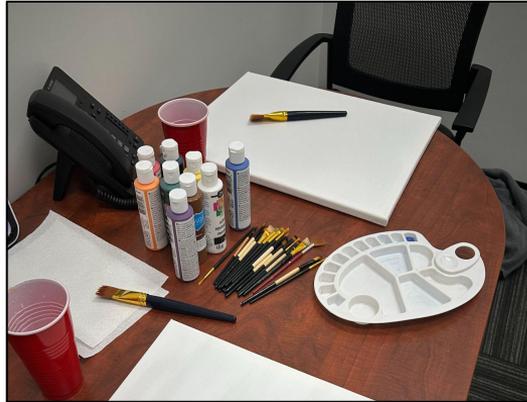
- Recognized areas of weakness and how to support students and the community
- Increased involvement from staff with implementation of strategies and support
- Parent involvement and engagement in learning
- Gratitude from students





Mental Health Pilot Project - Next Steps

- Professional development and parent sessions to be focused on the top three referred executive functioning skills
- Continue to collaborate and provide meaningful instruction, resources and support to the schools and community at large
- Increase universal and small group support for referred students



Thank you!



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References

Daniels , E. R. (2023). *The regulated classroom: Bottom-up trauma-informed teaching*. Here This Now, LLC.

Faith, L., Bush, C.-A., & Dawson, P. (2022). *Executive function skills in the classroom: Overcoming barriers, building strategies*. The Guilford Press.

Image from Freepik

https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/flat-background-world-mental-health-day_30828182.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=26&uuid=6aec9819-518d-43c6-951c-909001d50432>Image by freepik

Icon from Flaticon [https://www.flaticon.com/free-icons/leaves](https://www.flaticon.com/free-icons/leaves "leaves icons") title="leaves icons">Leaves icons created by kornkun - Flaticon

