2016

System insights from ‘WellAhead’
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Suggested citation:

“Here’s how a year of applying design and systems thinking changed our approach to advancing social and emotional wellbeing in schools.”

The design process followed 3 stages.

1. Co-design: August - December 2015

Aiming to inform a design process, WellAhead worked with school districts in BC to conduct workshops and the following three learning goals were identified:

- Understanding the true impact of schools on well-being and social-emotional development
- A deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which schools can achieve positive effects on mental health
- Establishing the long-term impact of the model

In October, a workshop was held in Vancouver to develop a shared vision and align the work of the districts. The conversation was facilitated by the McConnell Foundation, which also provided feedback on the results.

2. Prototyping: January - June 2016

In the prototyping phase, school districts began working iteratively and emergently over time to test a variety of approaches and solutions.

- Developmental prototyping: Prototypes were established to allow for testing, learning, and adjustment.
- Scaling prototyping: Prototypes were scaled up or down depending on the results.
- Feedback prototyping: Feedback was incorporated into the process.

3. Scaling: July 2016 onwards

The process was monitored and adjusted over time to ensure ongoing improvement.

We revised our theory of change.

The updated theory of change reflects the impact of design and systems thinking.

1. Core set of values

- Inclusion
- Collaboration
- Equity
- Innovation
- Impact

2. Community-led, participatory change process

- School districts
- Students
- Parents
- Teachers
- Community partners

3. Strategic focus on ‘everyday practices’

- Teaching
- Learning

This was our original theory of change.

In 2015, WellAhead worked with 6 school districts in BC to test an approach that involved 3 core elements.

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Applying systems thinking showed us how different levels interact.

Here are the big remaining questions.

- Is a social innovation lab process an effective and feasible approach at the school district level?
- How can we apply design thinking to inform our work at the provincial and national level? How do we involve and how?
- Given the complexity of the system encompassed by wellbeing in schools, what is a realistic level or scale of intervention? How do we balance breadth vs. depth of learning and impact?
- What are tools we could use to better track our efforts at multiple levels and map them against the actions of others to better visualize system gap?