

For immediate release

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Strategies for Supporting Students’ Mental Health and Well-Being Through Reading

COMOX VALLEY, B.C. – The District Learning Resource Centre (LRC) has taken on an instrumental role in the delivery of mental health support for students with the creation of kits.

Joan Pearce, LRC Teacher-Library, and her team have created reading kits that support teachers and the education curriculum and is in direct support of the goals and priorities set by the Board of Education and District leadership team.

“I really keep my finger on the pulse of the direction that the District is going in,” explained Pearce. “In our 2019 – 2023 Strategic Plan, mental health and physical well-being are identified as key priorities.

The strategic plan is, in essence, a road map for the District to follow for the next four years. And to support the work of Esther Shatz, Director of Student Services, and her staff who oversee the implementation of mental wellness, the LRC set out to create resources that could assist schools and teachers in educating students about the diverse range of topics related to mental health and well-being.

The LRC had already been building kits on social and emotional learning and self-regulation in collaboration with Andrea Wilson and Andrea Flesher. In collaboration with Leanne Webster Brenner, NIDES/Navigate and Miracle Beach school counsellor, Pearce and the LRC team created specific themed kits for primary and intermediate students on diverse areas including worry, low-mood, friendship issues, family life, bullying and teasing, loss and grief, as well as neurological diversity and gender identity.

The goal of these kits is to help students explore and reflect on each of the themed topics and how it affects their mental health and well-being. At the intermediate level, novel books for reading are used whereas picture books are the source material for the primary learners.

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As students vary greatly in their interests and life experiences, the kits contain a wide variety of books on the topic. For example, some novels for the intermediate grades touch lightly upon the theme while other reading material explore a topic in greater detail.

“Some novels take a lighter approach and others a more intense,” said Pearce. “The variety of picture books in each kit also provides primary teachers with the opportunities to select the books that meet the unique needs of their group of young learners.”

Pearce and Webster Brenner noted that teachers and students vary considerably in their comfort level of reading the various themes covered in the novels so, each kit was built with flexibility and range in interest level (IL) and reading level (RL) . Educators have the discretion to determine the suitability of the titles for their students, as well as teach students how to select novels that they are comfortable with.

“I am always amazed at the wonderful activities and discussions intermediate teachers have with students related to reading books out loud to their classes, individual novel study, or whole class novel study, said Pearce. “As such I tried to design the kits in such a way to offer them the maximum flexibility possible in using the kits. The same holds for the primary kits, as primary teachers are masters at using picture books as a springboard for discussions that help meet the social and emotional needs of their unique learners.”

Before any book is selected for a kit, Pearce methodically reviews each publication, often noting that if a publisher gives a novel an IL match to grades 3 to 6, for example, she will determine it is far better suited for a higher level such as grades 4 to 7 or, sometimes, grades 5 to 8.

For this reason, it took time to build kits properly and was a team effort. Debra Lovett, LRC Clerk, oversaw the processing and cataloguing of books including labelling and packaging material. Heather Mercier, LRC Accounting, handled all the placement and completion of orders including researching available resources.

Not all material is in hard copy format. Some of the books in the kits are available in professionally narrated audio books, available to loan through our schools’ Destiny Library program. ARC-BC digital copies are also available for every title when needed. Accessibility to such digital versions ensures inclusion of all student learners, which is also a key District priority.

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About LRC

The goal of the LRC is to provide learning resources to support elementary teachers in the Comox Valley as they implement the B.C. Curriculum in their classrooms. Allan Douglas, Director of Instruction, played a key role in the creation of what has now evolved into the LRC and ensuring the facility was maintained in the District as a valuable resource for educators to access learning materials that reflect 21st century learning and pedagogy.

For more information about the LRC and staff access to Destiny is available on the Learn71 portal at <http://learn71.ca/learning-resource-centre-lrc/>

Image (Credit: Comox Valley Schools)

Joan Pearce, District Learning Resource Centre Teacher-Librarian, showcases the several kits prepared by the LRC to support the District's priority and goals toward mental health and wellness.

Media Contact

Mary Lee
Manager of Communications
Comox Valley Schools (School District 71)
mary.lee@sd71.bc.ca
Office: (250) 334-5500
Mobile: (250) 792-3428

Facebook.com/ComoxValleySchools/
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instagram.com/comoxvalleysd71/