



Wednesday, February 4, 2026

OPEN LETTER

Re: Youth Worker Roles and Student Mental Health Supports

Addressed to:

Maria Meehan

Superintendent of Special Services

Toronto Catholic District School Board

Brendan Browne

Director of Education

Toronto Catholic District School Board

I am writing to seek clarification regarding the direction being given to schools about youth work mental health supports and how this aligns with student well being across the system.

It has been reported that principals have been advised that schools are not required to maintain school wide youth work supports and that youth workers should instead be assigned primarily within special education programs. To be clear, this is not a criticism of the vital work youth workers do in special education. That work is valued and necessary. However, there is growing concern that narrowing the role in this way limits access to trained mental health professionals for the broader student population.

Youth workers provide proactive, relationship-based, and real-time mental health support to students across both elementary and secondary panels. Their training is rooted in youth development, trauma informed practice, de-escalation, and social emotional intervention. Their consistent presence in schools allows them to identify concerns early, support regulation, and intervene before issues escalate. This preventative approach benefits individual students and strengthens the overall school environment.

While students do have access to social work supports, that access is often limited to once or twice a week. Social workers are managing significant caseloads across multiple schools and are frequently required to focus on crisis-driven situations. Youth workers embedded in schools day in and day out, often for years at a time, are able to build trusted relationships with students across the school community. These relationships function as a critical first line of support, allowing concerns to be identified and addressed early.

When youth workers are properly utilized in a school's wide capacity, they do not replace social work services. They complement them. Youth workers can provide ongoing relationship-based support, triage emerging concerns, and work collaboratively with social workers to ensure students receive the appropriate level of care. This partnership reduces strain on an already overtaxed social work department and allows a greater number of students to be supported in meaningful ways.

Guidance counsellors also play an important and respected role in schools, particularly in academic programming and post-secondary planning. However, their training is not equivalent to youth work practice, and these roles are not interchangeable. Redirecting youth work

responsibilities without comparable supports in place risks creating gaps in care for students who rely on specialized social emotional and mental health intervention.

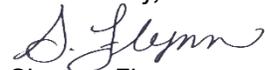
Beginning in 2014, TCDSB began removing CYWs from school wide roles in what was framed as a cost saving measure. While the intent may have been financial efficiency, the impact has been a steady erosion of preventative, relationship-based mental health supports in schools. When properly resourced and integrated, youth work supports directly strengthen the academic mandate by creating safer, more regulated schools where learning can occur. The collective outcome is a safer, more stable, and more productive learning environment that supports cohesive and positive educational outcomes for all students.

As a former school wide CYW, I have seen firsthand how effective this collaborative model can be when youth workers, social workers, and school staff work together. School wide CYWs had the capacity to build relationships across the building, know students before issues escalated, and intervene quickly and appropriately. Limiting youth workers to narrower roles risks further dismantling a proven, evidence-based approach that supports both student wellbeing and workplace safety.

Given the increasing complexity of student mental health needs and the ongoing impact of chronic underfunding, we are seeking clarity on the rationale behind this direction, whether it has been formally issued, and how student access to timely, relationship based mental health support is being safeguarded. We are asking how this approach ensures that all students, not only those in designated programs, have access to trained professionals who can support their wellbeing.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and to explore solutions that preserve and restore youth work supports in recognition of their critical value to students.

In solidarity,



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