

**2018-  
2020**

*Faith and Wellness:  
A Daily Mental Health Resource*  
**Case Study**

**School Mental Health Ontario:**  
Alexandra Fortier, Louise Moreau, Kathy Short  
**Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association**  
Belinda Russo, Susan Perry  
**Brock University**  
Naomi Andrews, Elizabeth Al-Jbouri, Emma Peddigrew



School  
Mental Health  
Ontario

Santé mentale  
en milieu scolaire  
Ontario

Western  Centre for School  
Mental Health

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource .....	5
Phases of Development and Research .....	5
Timeline.....	6
Phase 1: Exploration .....	6
Establishing a need.....	6
Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations .....	6
Learning Skills and Work Habits .....	7
Phase 2: Development.....	7
Developing the Faith and Wellness Resource.....	7
Phase 3: The F&W Pilot and Research Projects.....	8
Step 1: Pilot Project .....	8
Step 2: Wait-list Control Trial Evaluation .....	13
Phase 4: Implementation Considerations .....	17
Phase 5: Sustainment.....	19
Lessons Learned.....	19
Lessons learned about the co-development process and partnerships.....	20
Lessons learned about pilots.....	20
Lessons learned about evaluation process .....	20
Lessons learned about planning for implementation.....	20
Next Steps .....	20
References .....	21
Contact information: .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Partners: .....	22

## Executive Summary

**Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource** (F&W) is designed to help elementary teachers support students' social-emotional skills through daily faith-based practices. Many of the daily practices in the F&W resource give students opportunities to practice and develop learning skills. The F&W resource and adaptations focus primarily on supporting the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, as well as the six learning skills and work habits categories included on the Ontario provincial report card.

**Resource development.** The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) partnered to tailor Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource, which builds on the Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource (EDMH). The goal in adapting EDMH was to seamlessly link the resource to the Catholic Faith while incorporating elements that were practical, useful, and meaningful for teachers.

The resource writing team wanted to make explicit connections between the Catholic Faith and the various resource practices. The writing team and working group co-developed the connections and provided suggestions on how each practice links to Catholic Faith through doctrine, scripture passage, and prayer.

**Resource research.** To determine the effectiveness of the F&W resource, SMH-ON and OECTA partnered with researchers from York and Brock Universities. Initial findings revealed that teachers reported:

- improved knowledge and confidence around teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) practices in their classrooms
- increased frequency of teaching SEL concepts after using the resource compared to before using the resource
- increased number of students in their classrooms practicing effective SEL skills
- increased perceptions of positive classroom climate

### Lessons learned about the co-development process and partnerships

- Collaboration among multiple stakeholders and organizations, including SMH-ON, OECTA, ETFO, York University, and Brock University, led to the meaningful development, evaluation, and implementation of the F&W resource.
- Co-development of the resource facilitated the sharing of different perspectives.

### Lessons learned about the piloting process

- The piloting process allowed the team to adjust the resource based on teachers' feedback before undertaking a larger implementation.
- Some teachers suggested that email correspondence about the project could be streamlined.
- A few teachers wanted more support to use the resource.

### **Lessons learned about the evaluation process**

- Province-wide labour issues, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the importance of flexibility when planning and enacting research.

### **Lessons learned about planning for implementation**

- Strong partnerships are important, particularly when sharing and implementing a resource.
- Common messaging provides the user with clarity about the resource.
- Coordinated support offered locally (through Mental Health Leaders and local OECTA presidents) and provincially (through OECTA's provincial office) avoids duplication of effort.
- Coordinated supports facilitate a streamlined approach, where teachers can access the help they need.

### **Next Steps:**

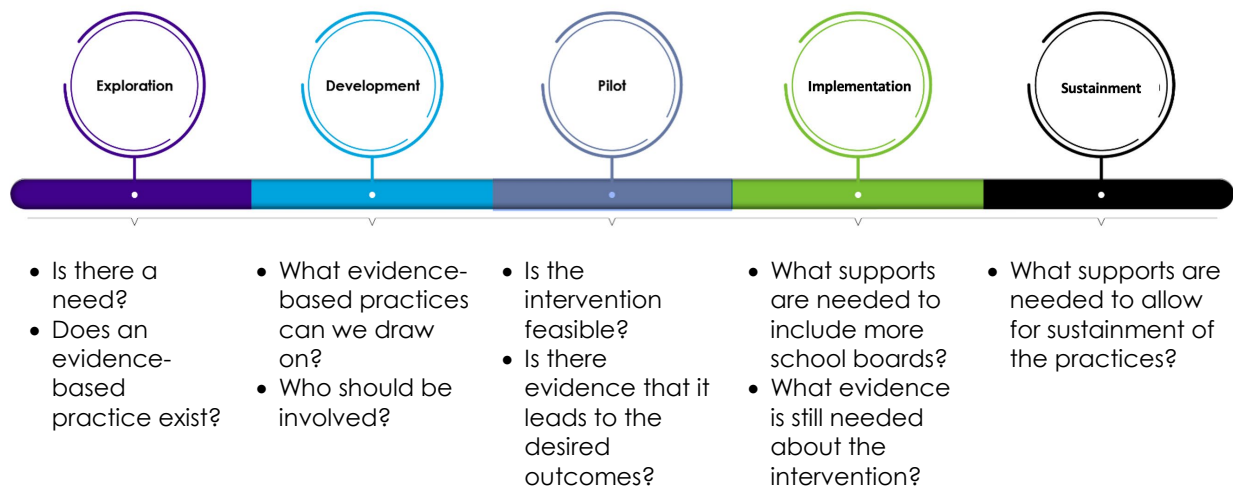
The co-development of F&W paved the way for a partnership between School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) to develop a similar resource for secondary teachers and students...stay tuned!

## Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource

Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource (F&W) is a resource that helps elementary teachers support students' social-emotional skills through daily faith-based practices. The resource was developed by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) in partnership. The F&W resource is based on the *Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource*<sup>1</sup>.

### Phases of Development and Research

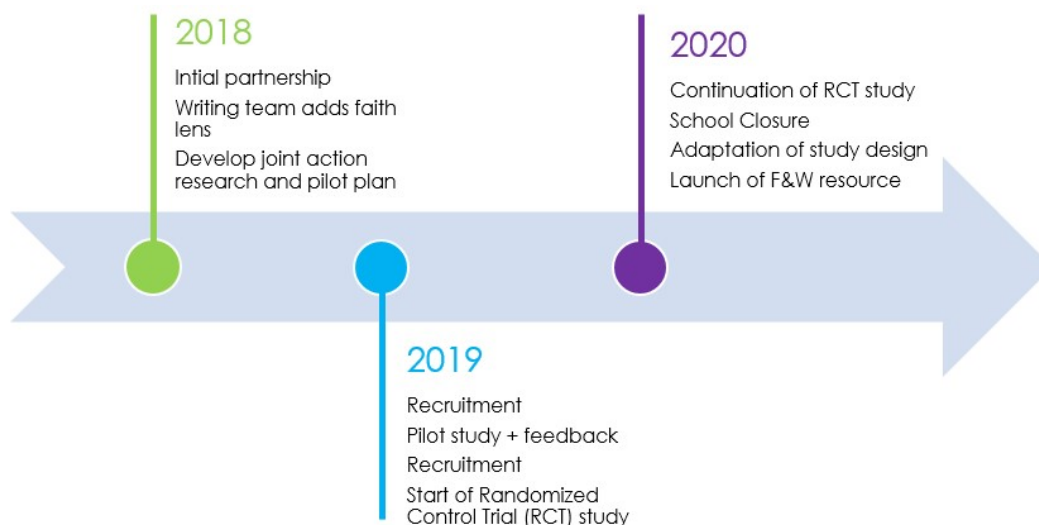
This case study explains the development process for the Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource (F&W). Specifically, this project considers the following five phases:



While these phases are presented in sequence, in practice, the process was iterative.

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about this resource, please refer to the [Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource Case Study](#)

## Timeline



## Phase 1: Exploration

SMH-ON reached out to partner with OECTA to develop a version of the EDMH resource that would be suitable for use in Ontario's elementary Catholic schools. Building on the EDMH resource, SMH-ON and OECTA collaborated to meet the needs of their members while also working to align and integrate the faith component within the resource.

### Establishing a need

The goal in adapting the EDMH was to link the resource to the Catholic Faith while incorporating elements that were practical, useful, and meaningful for teachers. The writing team was interested in making explicit connections between the Catholic Faith and the various practices included in the EDMH resource. These connections were co-developed by the workgroup, who provided suggestions on how each practice connects to faith through doctrine, scripture passage, prayer, etc. Overall, the EDMH format was kept as the baseline structure<sup>2</sup> for the new faith-based F&W resource. Adaptations focused primarily on supporting the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, as well the 6 learning skills and work habits categories included on the Ontario provincial report card.

### Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations

The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGE) were developed by the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) in collaboration with the Ontario Catholic education community. The OCSGE includes 7 overall and 52 specific expectations that represent the distinctiveness and purpose of Catholic education in Ontario through a set of knowledge, skills, values, and actions. Originally issued in 1998, OCSGE have been

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the structure of the EDMH resource that was the basis for the F&W version, please refer to [EDMH case study](#).

in place for more than two decades. Explicit connections between the OCSGE and the F&W resource are important for its uptake and use.

## Learning Skills and Work Habits

Many of the daily practices in the F&W resource give students opportunities to develop and practice learning skills. The Ontario provincial report card identifies six learning skill categories: Responsibility, Independent Work, Initiative, Self-Regulation, Collaboration and Organization. Similarly, in the Kindergarten program, student expectations are organized into four frames: Belonging and Contributing, Problem Solving and Innovating, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and Self-Regulation and Well-being. Aligning F&W practices with these specific learning skills allows teachers to support student wellbeing while also providing opportunities to develop and assess student learning skills. By connecting the resource's practices to specific expectations within each frame, teachers can connect the resource to curriculum expectations. They can also add new practices to this evergreen resource.

**Key Point:** Adapt existing resources to meet the needs of key partners where possible.

## Phase 2: Development

SMH-ON and OECTA agreed that the adaptation of the *Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource* was an efficient way to meet the needs of elementary Catholic teachers in Ontario. OECTA invited all members to apply to be part of the writing team. A small writing team (n=4) came together to work on the F&W resource.

## Developing the Faith and Wellness Resource

The writing team adopted the following guidelines:

- 1) Build on the existing EDMH resource
- 2) Use evidence-informed strategies to enhance predetermined social-emotional learning categories
- 3) Make connections to the Catholic Faith

The team adapted each EDMH practice to include a faith-based perspective and faith-based materials such as biblical passages, scripture, prayers, etc. The team also suggested new practices based on their teaching experiences. SMH-ON examined the team's suggestions to ensure newly proposed practices were evidence-based and supported the development of one of the six SEL skills. After the practices were added and/or enhanced, the final F&W resource had approximately 80 daily mental health practices.

**Key Point:** Find balance between practice and research.

## Phase 3: The F&W Pilot and Research Projects

To determine the effectiveness of the new F&W resource, SMH-ON and OECTA partnered with researchers from two universities: York and Brock. In preparation for the randomized control trial (RCT), the researchers conducted a pilot study with a handful of participants to gather feedback to improve the usability of the resource.

### Step 1: Pilot Project

The pilot project aimed to explore how the F&W resource impacted Catholic elementary teachers':

- Knowledge about SEL
- Confidence in delivering SEL practices in their classrooms
- Frequency of teaching SEL concepts
- Perception of classroom climate, and
- Perception of the number of students demonstrating effective SEL skills

Another goal of the pilot was to refine the resource, based on teacher feedback, before engaging in a more robust province-wide evaluation.

### Teacher Recruitment

During the Fall of 2018, OECTA invited elementary teachers to apply to participate in the pilot project and try the F&W resource in their classrooms. OECTA sent the invitation by memo to local units and posted it on their website. Teachers could apply as a team (e.g., a team of kindergarten teachers, a team representing a specific school) or as individuals. By December 2018, OECTA received 122 applications. To have a broad representation, teachers were chosen across a range of grades (from kindergarten to grade 8), teaching assignments (i.e. French Immersion, learning resource, special education), and geographical regions. In January 2019, 22 teachers across nine school boards were invited to take part in the pilot project. Half (n = 11) took part as individuals, and half (n = 11) participated as part of a grade specific or school team.

Successful applicants and their boards mental health leaders (MHLs) took part in an online information session at the end of January 2019. The session, hosted by OECTA provided information about the project team, the resource, the study timeline, and study expectations. It also gave participants an opportunity to ask questions. Following the meeting, teachers re-evaluated whether the pilot was a good fit for them.

### Community of Practice

SMH-ON led a province-wide community of practice (CoP) for the MHLs supporting the project. These monthly, one-hour, optional calls gave MHLs opportunities to discuss the successes and challenges that teachers in their boards were experiencing when using the resource in their classrooms. MHLs asked clarifying questions of SMH-ON implementation coaches and shared their ideas with one another about ways to



support teachers using the resource. They also discussed how to reach teachers, how to support peer-to-peer strategies, how to work collaboratively with new partners, how to disseminate the resource following its official launch, and how to enhance uptake of the resource.

**Key Point:** Engage local implementation supports from the outset

## Methodology

Teachers in the pilot study completed a pre-survey that gave them access to the online resource. From February to May 2019, participants were asked to review all the F&W resource content (i.e. the Home, Background, Helpful Tips and Tutorials tabs) and to try at least one practice three times from each of the six SEL skill categories. At minimum, teachers were expected to implement 18 practices with students in their classrooms during this time. Additionally, for any practice they implemented three or more times, teachers were asked to complete an online feedback form that detailed:

- Grade of practice delivery
- Number of times the practice was delivered in a bi-weekly period
- Student engagement in and understanding of the practice
- Adaptations made to the practice
- Appropriateness of proposed Catholic connection for the practice, and
- Overall impressions about the practice

To encourage teachers to provide feedback, SMH-ON sent bi-weekly emails containing a URL link to the online feedback form. In June 2019, participating teachers received one day of release time to complete a post-survey and to take part in an online discussion about their experiences and their perceptions of students' experiences with the practices.

With these encouragements, 16 teachers submitted between 1 to 20 feedback forms for a total of 107 feedback forms, ranging across the six SEL categories and delivered across all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

## Teacher Responses to Specific Practices<sup>3</sup>

After implementing a practice three times, teachers provided feedback on their perceptions of that practice and on their perception of the level of student engagement. Most teachers reported that the Catholic connection in the practices were both applicable and grade appropriate. Teachers also rated students as highly engaged in the practices.

---

<sup>3</sup> For more details about these findings, please refer to the *Faith and Wellness Evaluation Report (2020)*

Furthermore, teachers' own perceptions of the practices were also highly positive. They found that the practices were:

- Developmentally appropriate for students' level
- Well-suited for the diverse backgrounds of students
- Well-suited for the diverse learning needs of students
- Easily implemented into daily routines

Teachers felt the practices were beneficial for themselves as well as students and reported they would use the F&W practices again.

### Impacts of the Pilot Project over Time

The research team compared teachers' survey responses before and after engaging with the resource over the three-month period. All variables tested (with one exception) showed statistically significant differences, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large. Specifically, teachers reported:

- Increased knowledge of SEL teaching
- Higher general confidence around SEL teaching (marginally significant)
- Greater confidence around teaching SEL in the six categories
- Higher frequency of teaching SEL concepts after using the resource (compared to before using the resource)
- More students in their classrooms practicing effective SEL skills
- More students in their class met the criteria of a Catholic school graduate
- More positive perceptions of classroom climate

### Teachers' General Impressions of the F&W Resource

Overall, teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with the resource and all (100%) indicated they would recommend the resource to other teachers in their own division/role and in other divisions/roles.

In focus groups, teachers also reported very positive experiences using the F&W resource. They described how students responded positively to the practices, how students were highly engaged, and how using the practices made an observable impact in their classrooms:

"The students were engaged, some even surprised me by their level of engagement. It is a great way to help the class slow down, take some breaths, feel what it means to be present, and calm. The students had some great insight and feedback to give. They described feeling 'calm, relaxed and happy.' One student said, 'I think it worked really well because my brain cleared.' Another said, 'I like that it just gave me time to be alone with myself,' and, 'I think it's good because I let out my worries instead of just bringing them into myself'."

Teachers also reported that the skills learned through the practices extended beyond the classroom to the playground, to students' academic achievement, and even into students' home life:

"I have a class where there's a lot of stress/low self-esteem/incidents on the yard. When incidents come up, we talk about it as a class. What this program has changed for me is that I'm working more preventatively now, not just doing interventions when incidents come up. Learning to do what to do with our bodies when they're stressed, walking away and breathing. The kids are equipped better with a toolkit, but a lot of preventative measures as well."

"My students used these activities in their school and home life. I noticed them using the *Five Finger Breathing*. They would tell me they were teaching their siblings or parents lessons at home, that they were using the body scan to go to sleep at night. They were going out into the world and spreading the news."

Teachers discussed the importance of the Catholic connections in the resource. One noted that using prayers as a calming exercise (e.g., *Glory Be to God*) or to call for students' attention was useful in combining the practice with Catholic Faith. Others noted:

"Some students said they never felt as close to God as when they participated in [*Imaginary Nature Walk*]. It was a huge hit as a classroom management tool and often used after recess to bring students back into focus. A colleague sat in on one session and commented that the peace and serenity she experienced was amazing."

In addition to impacting students, teachers spoke about how the practices helped them. Connecting each practice to specific learning skills made it easy for teachers to track students' progress and incorporate that progress in report card comments. Teachers found that implementing the practices improved their own mental health and self-care, and helped them foster more positive relationships with students:

"I think we often assume that students have these skills, but they are vulnerable and need support. This resource allows us the time to make students aware of mental health and that there are tools that students can use themselves at six years old. It also makes us aware as teachers to take care of ourselves and model self-care for the students, that we need to take care of ourselves too. I also think this is a great resource for new teachers."

"[*Daily Check-In*] went so well in my room that it is now a permanent part of our week. The students respect check-in and know that I want to know how they are feeling. This is such a powerful way to create relationships with students and know their story. I think that hearing each student's story is crucial for learning to take place."

When asked what feedback teachers had for others who hadn't yet used the resource, they noted that implementing the practices multiple times (even daily) was important for students' wellbeing and academic performance. With each use, the practices were seen as more successful. In addition, each practice can be adapted and adjusted by the teacher or students to suit their class. Many teachers implemented mindfulness practices at the start of the day, right after lunch, and at the end to the day; teachers reported that having a structure to scaffold the day was extremely helpful for both

students and teachers. Teachers said regular and repeated use of the practices was more beneficial and helped integrate SEL practices into the classroom culture.

### Incorporating Feedback

Following the end of the pilot project in June 2019, the research team compiled and reviewed information and feedback from participants. This data informed changes to the resource. A small group of teachers made edits and revisions to the resource during the summer months of 2019. To further evaluate the resource, a more rigorous evaluation was planned for the 2019-2020 school year.

### Classroom Visits and Promotional Video

In March 2019, OECTA asked pilot participants if provincial office staff could visit their classroom to see the F&W practices in a classroom environment. Through these visits, OECTA aimed to informally gather anecdotal feedback from the teachers and students about their experience with the resource. In April and May 2019, provincial office staff visited four classrooms: one grade 8 classroom in Toronto, one grade 6 classroom in Kingston and 2 Kindergarten classes in Niagara. Each class visit lasted about half a day and staff saw firsthand several practices in action. Staff witnessed a high level of student engagement with various F&W practices and heard about the positive impact the practices had on students, teachers, and the learning environment.

Following the classroom visits, the OECTA provincial team decided to capture the voices of participating teachers and students with the help of a videographer. OECTA sought approval from school administrators and prepared student consent waivers. Once the school visits were organized and the proper approvals gathered, participants were given a list of questions to prompt feedback. The prompts were as follows:

1. Identify your name, grade, and school.
2. What did you enjoy most about the resource?
3. How did your students respond to the practices? Provide examples.
4. Did you or your students have a favourite practice/activity? Which one? Why? Explain.
5. Would you recommend the resource to colleagues?
6. Did the practices connect to the faith development of your students?
7. How did the practices impact the social emotional learning among students?
8. Did the resource have a positive impact in your classroom? Explain.

The recordings were edited into a short promotional video that showcased the resource. The video was intended to be posted on the F&W site and used to promote the resource among OECTA members at local events, gatherings, and professional development sessions.

**Key Point:** Translate feedback in ways that will resonate and engage intended audiences

## Step 2: Wait-list Control Trial Evaluation

In July 2019, SMH-ON asked all Ontario English Catholic school boards about their preferences for releasing the F&W resource during the 2019-2020 school year. Specifically, boards were asked to choose one of the following four options:

- 1) **No research, open release**  
All English and French Catholic DSBs would have access to the resource in the Fall 2019, therefore no research would be conducted.
- 2) **Pre/Post, no control design**  
All English and French Catholic DSBs would have access to the resource in the Fall 2019. Teachers and students would complete measures before accessing the resource and three months after gaining access to see if there were gains in classroom culture, teacher confidence, student SEL skills, student wellness based on both student and teacher report.
- 3) **Randomized Controlled Trial, using a board-level wait-list control design**  
All English and French Catholic DSBs would have access to the resource during the 2019 school year - half of the boards would be randomly assigned to get access in the Fall (Oct/Nov), and the other half of the boards would get access in the Winter (Feb/Mar). All participating students and teachers would complete surveys in the Fall and Winter to see if there were gains in classroom culture, teacher confidence, student SEL skills, student wellness, and (perhaps) academic performance indicators.
- 4) **Randomized Controlled Trial, using a school-level wait-list control design**  
All English and French Catholic DSBs would have access to the resource during the 2019 school year, beginning in the Fall. Half of the schools within each board would be randomly assigned to get access in the Fall (Oct/Nov), and the other half of schools would get access in the Winter (Feb/Mar). All participating schools would complete surveys in the Fall and Winter to see if there were gains in classroom culture, teacher confidence, student SEL skills, student wellness, and (perhaps) academic performance indicators.

The majority of school boards who responded preferred option 3, so the F&W resource team designed a wait-list randomized control trial study and sought ethics approval from Brock University and all English Catholic school boards across the province. In September 2019, the team sent ethics applications to the Research Ethics Board at Brock University and school board research departments/offices. Brock University

granted ethics approval at the end of September 2019, and by mid-October 2019, 19 school boards had agreed to participate in the research. OETCA provided the Brock University research team a list of characteristics for participating boards (i.e. urban/rural, large/mid/small size board). School boards were match-paired based on urban/rural makeup and size, then paired boards were randomly assigned so that one board from each pair was in Cohort 1 and the other board was in Cohort 2. This assignment resulted in 9 school boards in Cohort 1 and 10 in Cohort 2.

### Wait-list Control Trial Objectives

The goals of the wait-list control trial were similar to the pilot. Specifically, the control trial aimed to explore how the F&W resource impacted Catholic elementary teachers':

- Knowledge about SEL
- Confidence in delivering SEL practices within their classrooms
- Frequency of teaching SEL concepts
- Perception of classroom climate, and
- Perception of the number of students practicing effective SEL skills

In the wait-list control trial, students from a select number of classrooms were asked to complete surveys and take part in focus group discussions about whether the F&W resource helped students:

- Recognize and manage emotions more effectively
- Have a positive attitude towards themselves and others, and
- Show positive behaviour in the classroom

### Teacher Recruitment

Teacher recruitment began in mid-October 2019. Elementary teachers were recruited concurrently through their school boards and local OECTA offices. School boards used a variety of methods to recruit teachers, including targeted emails, personal invitations through the MHL and/or Principal, as well as word of mouth. At the same time, OECTA advertised the study through provincial and local office e-Newsletters, Facebook pages, and websites. A targeted email invitation was sent to the 22 teachers who had piloted the resource during the previous spring. A total of 7 teachers from this group agreed to take part in the wait-list control study. Because these teachers already had experience with the resource, they were assigned to Cohort 3 and had access to the resource in Fall 2019, even if they were employed by boards who were randomly assigned to Cohort 2. For Cohort 1, 117 teachers signed up to take part, while 75 were recruited for Cohort 2. A total of 235 teachers across all three cohorts were recruited to take part in the study.

Students from 19 classrooms (8 Cohort 1 classrooms and 11 Cohort 2 classrooms) were randomly selected to take part in the student component of the research for a total of 271 students.

## Methodology

The research team sent all interested teachers a link to an online consent form that provided information about the study and the F&W resource. Teachers were asked to participate before being notified about their randomized cohort assignment.

Specifically, teachers were asked to agree to the following conditions to take part in the study:

- Complete a pre-survey before gaining access to the resource (Cohort 1 & 3); complete a baseline and pre-survey before gaining access to the resource (Cohort 2)
- Try a minimum of one (1) practice at least three (3) times with their students for each of the six skill categories (for a minimum total of 18 practices) from October 2019 – May 2020 (Cohort 1 & 3), or from February until May 2020 (Cohort 2)
- Complete an online feedback form for each practice they delivered at least three times, detailing their own and their students' experiences with the practice
- Complete a mid-survey in February (Cohort 1 & 3) and a post-survey in June 2020 (Cohorts 1, 2, &3)
- Participate in a focus group in April 2020 (Cohorts 1 & 3), and June 2020 (Cohort 2) to share their experiences using the resource (optional)

Throughout the wait-list control trial, MHLs connected with participating teachers from their school boards to answer questions about, and offer support in, implementing the resource, when possible (there were labour issues at that time). At the mid-point of the research (February – March 2020), 61 teachers in Cohorts 1 and 3, and 69 teachers in Cohort 2, had completed the mid-survey, giving them access to the F&W resource and the opportunity to begin implementing practices with their students.

## COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the research trial was halted because of school closures ordered by the Ministry of Education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools were closed from March Break until the end of the school year. At the time of the school closures, almost all the mid-point data had been collected (pre/mid-surveys for Cohort 1 & 3 teachers/students and baseline/pre-survey for Cohort 2 teachers/students). Only 2 schools (5 classrooms) worth of student data was not collected.

The research team let teachers know they could continue to use the online resource virtually with their students, but that the corresponding research components of the control trial would stop.

The teacher focus groups for Cohort 1 were originally scheduled at the end of March 2020. However, March Break was extended by two-weeks, so the focus groups were re-scheduled to the end of April. In total, seven (7) teachers attended one of three focus groups.

## RCT Findings<sup>4</sup>

### Does the Faith and Wellness Resource Work?

Feedback from teachers provided strong evidence supporting the F&W resource. Teachers who had been randomly assigned to use the resource during the three-month implementation period reported that they:

- 1) Had higher confidence in their ability to deliver social emotional learning (SEL) practices
- 2) Taught SEL skills more frequently
- 3) Thought more students in their class demonstrated SEL skills
- 4) Thought more students in their class demonstrated competencies in the Catholic Graduate Expectations
- 5) Had more positive perceptions of their classroom climate
- 6) Thought more students in their class were motivated and engaged in school.

Teachers who did not use the resource reported no changes over time.

Further, the more times teachers implemented the resource, the more positive these changes were (for SEL knowledge, general SEL confidence, specific SEL confidence, and perceptions of students' SEL). These changes were found regardless of prior teaching experience or grade level. There was little evidence that other factors (prior teaching experience, grade level taught, or initial scores on outcomes of interest) were barriers to implementing the resource.

Students' responses showed a mixed picture. Overall, when comparing students whose teachers implemented the resource and those who did not, there were no differences related to SEL skills, general wellbeing, sense of positive classroom climate, school liking, and school motivation/engagement over time. However, within the group of students whose teachers implemented the resource, findings showed that the more times teachers implemented the resource, the more students increased in their:

- Confidence in their SEL skills
- General wellbeing
- Sense of positive classroom climate
- School liking

### Satisfaction and Feedback

Teachers and students who used the Faith and Wellness Resource reported high levels of satisfaction. Students felt the resource was helpful for themselves and their classmates, and most (81%) said they would like to continue using the resource. Similarly, teachers thought the resource was beneficial, easy to implement, and well

---

<sup>4</sup> This section is taken directly from the executive summary of the Faith and Wellness Evaluation Report (July 30, 2020).



suited for students of diverse backgrounds and learning needs. Teachers reported that students had generally positive responses to the practices and appeared to understand the concepts. They also reported that the Catholic connections included in the practices were applicable and grade appropriate. Most teachers (97%) said they would recommend the resource to others.

Teachers did indicate some challenges in implementing particular practices, though challenges were noted only 20% of the time. Most frequently reported challenges included: engaging some students in the practice, preventing students from acting silly or off task, and needing more time for some students to master the strategy. In almost all cases, teachers reported that only one or a few students experienced challenges and, in many cases, challenges dissipated after a few times implementing the practice.

Highlighting the adaptability of the practices, some teachers reported specific changes they made or suggested changes to practices (37% of the time). Specifically, teachers most frequently modified practices to be developmentally appropriate, embedded in other related class activities, or connected to another lesson. Some teachers also changed the length of time spent on the practice (lengthening or shortening), changed the format (using whole class, small groups, and individual formats), or changed the setting (using a quieter space rather than the classroom).

## Conclusion

Results from this research support the effectiveness and usefulness of the Faith and Wellness Resource for teachers and students in Catholic Elementary Schools across Ontario. Overall, the F&W resource was well received by teachers and students, easily implemented in the classroom, and helped support students' SEL skills as well as their general mental health and wellbeing.

**Key Point:** Unforeseen challenges prevented the team from conducting the RCT as designed. However, flexibility allowed the team to analyze the information gathered, which provided important insights.

## Phase 4: Implementation Considerations

Due to school closures and uncertainty about the 2020-2021 school year, OECTA wanted to provide the F&W resource to its members as soon as possible, and to support its use through professional learning opportunities. OECTA and SMH-ON worked hard over the summer months (July & August 2020) to get the F&W resource ready for a quick launch. While SMH-ON refined the resource, OECTA reached out to a few teachers who participated in the pilot and/or the research study to develop an on-line professional learning session supporting the resource. Activities included:

- Translating the resource into French
- Adding feedback and testimonials to the F&W site
- Triaging practices that were not relevant and/or adjusting content
- Finding relevant bilingual supplementary resources

- Revamping the entire F&W website (Figure 1)
- Rebranding all practice cards (Figure 2)

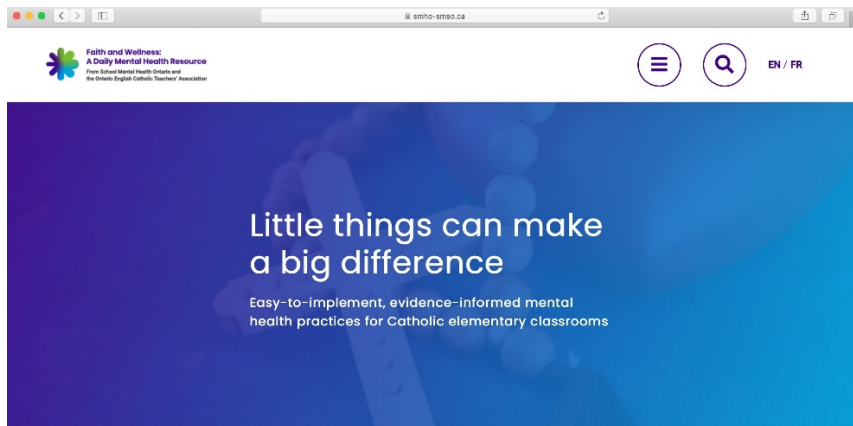


Figure 1: Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource website

POSITIVE MOTIVATION AND PERSEVERANCE
EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Giving thanks
+

Giving thanks

🕒
TIME 5-20 minutes

📊
LEVEL P/J/I

📄
MATERIALS N/A

<b>Purpose</b>	To help students intentionally notice the positive elements in their day and shift the balance towards optimism	<b>Evidence</b>	Gratitude is a concept related to the positive psychology movement and reflects the value that has been shown in holding an optimistic worldview. Many evidence-based programs that are designed to enhance optimism and reduce depressive symptoms have activities that help students to “find the silver lining”.
<b>Instructions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the practice.</li> <li>• We are going to take a few minutes, as a class, to share what we are grateful for today.</li> <li>• I will start. Today, I am grateful for...</li> <li>• Give everyone a chance to contribute. Some students may choose to “pass” as this may be a new experience and will take time to feel comfortable with it.</li> </ul>	<b>Catholic connection</b>	As Catholics we are reminded that we receive blessings from God and each other on a daily basis.
<b>Adaptations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rather than sharing gratitude out loud, you may choose to have students write one to three things they are grateful for in a journal at the end of each day.</li> <li>• This can also be done at the end of the day, either on a sticky note or verbally, and can be added to a classroom kindness wall or gratitude wall.</li> </ul>	<b>Catholic graduation expectations</b>	(3c) A reflective, creative and holistic thinker who creates, adapts, evaluates new ideas in light of the common good, and who thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems.



Figure 2: A sample Faith and Wellness practice card—front and back view.

## Collaboratively Supporting the Launch of F&W

As SMH-ON and OECTA had a strong partnership since the beginning of the project, both organizations agreed that the launch of the resource and its implementation support would be done jointly. The purpose of this joint launch was to keep all key audiences informed about the resource concurrently.

In addition to this shared communication, SMH-ON activated its “implementation cascade” throughout its network within Ontario's education system. This process entails:

- 1) SMH-ON team leads prepare a brief PowerPoint presentation for SMH-ON's implementation coaching team. The presentation explains what the resource is, the intended audience, and how it can be used. The presentation also provides coaching tips to help school boards successfully disseminate and implement the resource.

- 2) SMH-ON coaches reach out to the boards they support to announce the resource launch, offer information, and provide a promotional flyer to be shared within their board. SMH-ON coaches communicate with board MHLs and superintendents (SO) with responsibility for the mental health portfolio. Coaches also offer their help to align the resource with boards' existing *Mental Health and Addictions* strategy and action plans.
- 3) MHLs and SOs communicate through different channels to inform teachers in their board about the resource and its benefits. They also connect with local union presidents to plan for a collaborative approach to support dissemination and implementation locally.

In addition to this cascade, OECTA proposed to print several card decks for their members and MHLs to enhance enthusiasm related to the resource.

**Key Point:** Coordinating efforts to inform and support users is key to successful uptake of a new resource.

## Phase 5: Sustainment

While the launch of the resource is still in its infancy, the team has considered sustainment from the beginning. For example, each practice reinforces one of the six SEL skills that are now part of Ontario's curriculum. Furthermore, while the resource is anchored in research, it was written by and for teachers, which makes it highly relevant to them. Finally, teachers and students who used the F&W highlighted the benefits of the resource.

Despite these important enablers, to achieve sustainment is to keep the resource current and relevant to users. Because of the ongoing changing landscape of education and the world, this resource is evergreen, which means SMH-ON and OECTA will continue to use research and feedback from users to enhance the resource further (either through feedback forms from the website, or through the MHLs community of practice).

**Key Point:** Leave room for ongoing improvement through continuous quality improvement cycles and rapid feedback opportunities.

## Lessons Learned

The process of exploring, developing, implementing, and evaluating the F&W resource presented the collaborating teams with valuable lessons regarding co-development and partnerships, pilot testing, evaluation, and implementation.

## Lessons learned about the co-development process and partnerships

The development, evaluation, and implementation of the F&W resource was made possible through collaboration between multiple stakeholders and organizations, including SMH-ON, OECTA, ETFO, York University, and Brock University. This collaboration enabled a variety of voices to offer different perspectives, allowing the team to learn from each other and increase their knowledge and skills to benefit the teachers and students in Ontario's Catholic schools.

## Lessons learned about pilot testing

Through the process of piloting the resource, the team received feedback from teachers regarding resource content, program roll-out logistics, and evaluation planning. For example, the team made several edits and adaptations to practices, based on teacher feedback, to make the resource classroom-ready. Logistically, some teachers indicated there was too much email communication and suggested the email correspondence could be streamlined. Finally, with a view towards implementation, a few teachers expressed that they required greater support to use the resource.

## Lessons learned about evaluation processes

The province-wide labour issues, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated to the team the importance of being flexible when planning and conducting evaluation research.

## Lessons learned about planning for implementation

Strong partnerships are crucial, particularly when sharing and implementing resources. Having a common message provided users with clarity about the F&W resource. Furthermore, coordinated supports offered locally (through MHLs and local presidents) and provincially (through OECTA's provincial office) avoided duplication of effort and allowed a streamlined approach where teachers were able to access the level of help they needed.

## Next Steps...

Because this journey is not over, SMH-ON, OECTA and OSSTF have partnered to develop a similar resource for secondary teachers and students... stay tuned!

## References

- Andrews, N. C. Z., Al-Jbouri, E., & Peddigrew, E. (2020). *Faith and Wellness Evaluation Report: Testing a Social Emotional Learning Intervention for Catholic Elementary School Teachers across Ontario*. Report prepared for School Mental Health Ontario and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. Retrieved from <https://smho-smso.ca/fw/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2020/09/FW-Evaluation-Report.pdf>
- Fortier, A., Peer, A., McVey, G., Buono, S., Weaver, T., Moreau, L., & Short, K. (2020). *Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource*. Retrieved from [https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/docs/everyday\\_mental\\_health\\_study\\_2020.pdf](https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/docs/everyday_mental_health_study_2020.pdf)

## Contact information

For more information  
about **F&W research**,  
contact:

**Alexandra Fortier at**  
[afortier@smho-smso.ca](mailto:afortier@smho-smso.ca)

---

## Partners:



School  
Mental Health  
Ontario

Santé mentale  
en milieu scolaire  
Ontario

ONTARIO ENGLISH  
Catholic  
Teachers  
ASSOCIATION



YORK  
UNIVERSITY

LaMarsh Centre for Child & Youth Research