

Collaborating for Impact:

Lessons from CASA Mental Health
and Sturgeon Public Schools

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Session Overview

CASA Classrooms

- Why they matter
- What they offer
- How they are creating hope and impacting students

School Division Experience

- Return on investment (students and staff)

Planning the Way Forward

- Discussion time



CASA Mental Health

Child and Adolescent Services for All



Introducing CASA Classrooms

I imagine a world where mental health services showed up where kids already are. No need for caregivers to schedule an appointment or take time off work. **I imagine the support families need, built into their lives.**



Why CASA Classrooms?

According to Stats Canada, 20 per cent of students aged 12+ have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Alberta Education's enrollment statistics for students in Grades 7-12 (to align with Stat Can's 12+) puts Alberta's student population for those grades at around 389,662. That suggests **56,891** students who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition

Findings from the 2023 Canadian Health Survey indicate about a quarter of youth reported a decline in their mental health since 2019, and nearly half of youth who felt they often or always looked forward to school in 2019 no longer felt this way. The decline in optimism about schools was more pronounced in girls (52 per cent) than boys (48 per cent).

Emotional problems (e.g. anxiety and depression) are the most common issues experienced by young people, followed by behavioural problems. These difficulties may have a costly negative impact on educational attainment, drug use, criminality, physical health, poorer employment outcomes, not in education/ employment/ training (NEET) status, and financial difficulties. **The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for a coordinated response from different sectors of society, noting that "among all the sectors that play critical roles in adolescent health, education is key."**



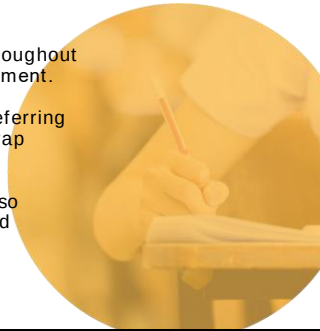
CASA Classrooms: Services

- Comprehensive mental health assessment
- Individualized treatment plan
- Individual and group therapy
- Physician consultation, including medication review and management
- Individualized academic instruction
- Caregiver/ guardian psychoeducation and targeted group programming
- Transition process, including purposeful tapering, transition back to their home classroom and medical provider
- Capacity-building for school division staff and teachers



Five Months + Five Months

- Cohorts begin in **September** and **February**.
- One semester is dedicated to intensive treatment in the classroom, followed by a second semester of tapered transition support to ensure success in the student's home classroom. Transition starts on day one of the classroom and continues until the end of the transition semester.
- The parent/ caregiver education group runs for nine weeks throughout the in-class semester so parents can support their child's treatment.
- The program not only provides service in the classroom and referring schools, but out in the community with families as part of a wrap around service.
- Transition supports not only ensure seamless transition, but also increase capacity of the returning schools to better understand mental health.



Provincial Data

- Since February 2023, CASA Mental Health has opened **27 CASA Classrooms** across the province in **seven geographic zones**.
 - Two schools discontinued, 25 classrooms currently operational.
- From February 2023 to September 2025:
 - 894 referrals were processed across the province
 - 542 patients admitted
 - 183 education sessions provided



Key Areas of Concern

- Emotional and related symptoms (94%)
- Peer relationship issues (83%)
- Family life and relationship issues (72%)
- Over-activity, attention or concentration concerns (67%)
- Scholastic or language skill concerns (55%)

Percentages indicate the percentage of students with this concern.



How have CASA Classrooms improved student mental health?

86 per cent of patients agree their experience in CASA Classrooms has improved their mental health.

95 per cent of caregivers agree CASA Classrooms has improved their child's mental health.



Key Areas of Improvement

Physical and emotional areas of improvement:

- Physical illness (100%)
- Reduction in non-accidental self-injury (88%)
- Peer relationships (54%)
- Reduction in disruptive, antisocial or aggressive behaviour (52%)
- Emotional and related symptoms (50%)



Key Areas of Improvement (Cont'd)

Academic improvements:

- Since February 2023, students in Grades 4-9 showed the following improvements over the five-month period:
 - Writing: 32 per cent show at least one year of academic advancement (n=100);
 - Reading: 50 per cent show at least one year of academic advancement (n=102);
 - Numeracy: 52 per cent show at least one year of academic advancement (n=108).
- The five-month period is significant, as it means students in a CASA Classroom are advancing faster than they would be expected to in the regular academic stream. In fact, the data shows some students advance by two or three grade levels.
- Also in a five-month period, CASA data indicates Classrooms students in Grades 10-12 complete 60 percent of the courses they are enrolled in (n=40; 80 of 142 courses). All data is as of May 2025.



How do we shift and adjust to make it work?

This is a new way of working. We are bringing to life a program that is not a school division specific program, nor a government program.

We have to do this together. Talking, being open to flexible ways of working and solution-finding, *together*, is key.

We are constantly working to adjust and improve our processes because we can. As a not-for profit organization, CASA Mental Health has the ability to shift within our focus area to work with our community partners to provide what is best for children and families.



Learn More About CASA Classrooms



casamentalhealth.org/classrooms



School Division Experience



Return on Investment (Students)

- Increased attendance
- Improved academics
- Increased graduation rate
- Reduced need for more intensive services
- Clarity on student need and support - diagnosis, assessments as needed, health care supports
- Wrap around service



Return on Investment (Staff)

- Upskilling in division around mental health, mental illness, understanding of the students in front of them
- Mental health by stealth - what is good for one is good for all, including your teachers!
- Increase in teacher efficacy
- Professional Development for Division Staff



Let's Call a Spade a Spade: Challenges to School Divisions

- Funding - Low enrolment classroom



Let's Call a Spade a Spade: Challenges to School Divisions

- Transportation



Let's Call a Spade a Spade: Challenges to School Divisions

- Classroom Complexity - CASA Classrooms not meeting the need



Fundamentals to Successful Implementation

- Buy in from System Leadership
 - School Division team put in place
- Reciprocal Relationship
 - Flexibility



Game Changers

Evolving

- Referrals
- Exclusion criteria
- Technology
- Language Shift
- Bringing mental health services to our students



Our “why” is doing what is best for students, so how do we address the challenges?



Cross- Ministerial Work

As systems leaders, how can we action this?

Danielle Smith's Letters to Ministers - [July 25, 2023](#) | [September 22, 2025](#)

- a. Sharing these as information to support the understanding the vision of the Premier - cross-ministerial work and career pathways for students.



Collaboration

- Who have you successfully collaborated with in regards to mental health supports?
- Who are the key “players”/ resources in your community to bring to the table to discuss how to improve and enhance CASA Classrooms?



Advocacy

- What are some points of advocacy for the funding needed?
- What language or approach should we be using with Alberta Education?



Our Why

"This program removed the barrier to accessing mental health services I and my family was experiencing. The service also made getting help and support easy and accessible. Having it available and integrated into the classroom was amazing.

I feel that the CASA program should be the program all classrooms should be modeled after. If more children and families had access to programs like this I feel there would be a positive impact in educational outcomes.

The CASA program was incredible for my son and helped him beyond measure. I feel it helped him establish a stronger foundation for his educational journey and helped set him up for success. The added support while he transitioned out of the program was also an asset to both him and myself.

As a parent I have never felt more like I was part of a collaborative team with my child's teachers and education staff as I did when he was in the CASA program. It was an extremely positive experience."



Thank You!

