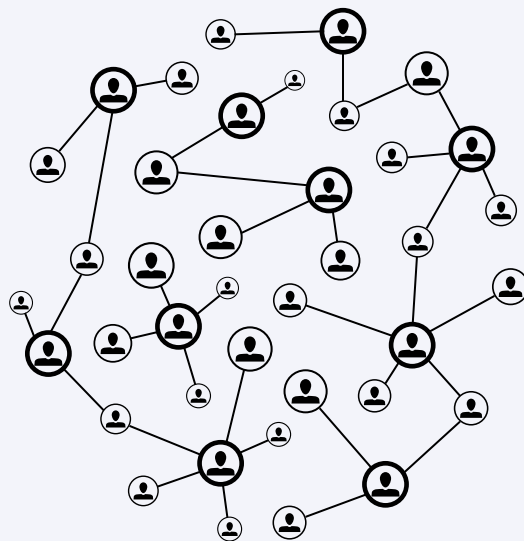


Social Connection Toolkit

2025



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This toolkit is part of a pilot program with three partner school districts. You are holding the first iteration of something we are building together—it is a work in progress that will grow and improve based on feedback.

We ask that you keep this within your school community for now and not share it more widely. While our vision is to eventually make this toolkit freely available to all, it currently remains the intellectual property of the CHART Lab as we refine and develop it. Thank you for being an early partner in this work. Your insights and experiences will directly shape future versions of this toolkit.

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Introduction

Welcome to the Social Connection Toolkit! Here, you will find 14 practical initiatives that schools can implement to build social connection, focusing on four key Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs): having invested non-parent adults, building community connections, fostering peer support, and creating a sense of school belonging.

These initiatives were drawn from four sources: a crowdsourcing survey circulated among educators, public health professionals, community organisations, and the general public; a rapid literature review of school-based social connection interventions; qualitative interviews with education and public health partners; and input from the CHART Lab's six Youth Advisory Council cohorts. An expert panel consisting of health, education, and research specialists, along with a youth panel of YAC members, was convened to provide ratings and recommendations on an initial set of 80 initiatives, based on criteria related to anticipated impact, feasibility & practicality, acceptability, accessibility & adaptability, inclusivity & equity.

The 24 initiatives with the highest ratings were then combined to form the final 14 included in this iteration of the toolkit.

On the following pages, you will find information about the initiatives, including the resources and time required, general steps for implementation, suggestions on how to engage young people, research bites, and additional ideas for adapting the initiatives. We understand that each school community is unique, so this is not meant to be a prescriptive manual but rather a source of ideas, providing an overview of steps to help educators, students, and community partners in the selection and planning process.

Please feel free to reach out to the CHART team after selecting an initiative to learn more about it.

Understanding each section

PCEs Legend:



Feeling supported by friends



Two invested, non-parental adults



Participating in community traditions



School belonging

What is it?

Overview of the initiative.

Time required

Excludes planning.

What do we need?

Main resources required for this initiative.

How do we do it?

Overview of steps for implementing initiatives. They can vary depending on your school context. The *Planning Tool* can help you reflect on the implementation strategies.

Why do it?

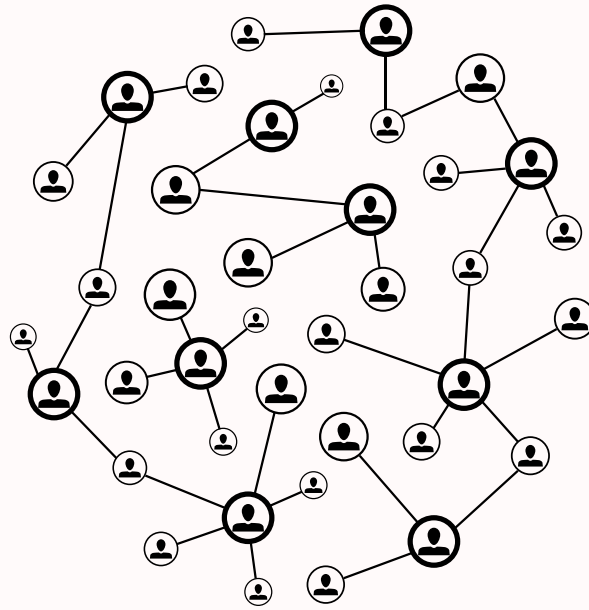
Highlights from the literature. Key references that informed this section are listed at the end of this toolkit (Appendix).

Ideas & adaptations

Includes suggestions to remove barriers and make the initiatives more inclusive. Some ideas also explore additional themes, suggestions for combining and sequencing, or alternative structures and frequency.

How to get youth involved

This section is not exhaustive. Youth leadership enhances the impact of the initiatives. Reflect on ways to support youth engagement within your school community. The *Youth Engagement Planning Document* can assist you in this process.



14 Social Connection Initiatives

Community Potluck



WHAT IS IT?

Students and adults from the school community **bring food to share and enjoy a meal together**. Connection over food is a low-stakes, highly accessible way to participate in a school event. A community potluck is an opportunity to create cultural connections.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Form a core planning committee of 4-6 people including parents, teachers, and student leaders. Recruit volunteers for specific roles: setup, registration table, food monitors, and cleanup. Set up a food coordination system (e.g. online sign-up sheets to track dishes). Include food safety guidelines and communicate any restrictions. On the week of the event, send detailed reminders with final logistics and volunteer assignments

Logistics: Secure administrative approval and book the venue for the chosen date and time. Coordinate with school custodial staff about building access and cleanup procedures. Create promotional materials and launch a promotion campaign through school newsletters, social media, flyers sent home, and classroom announcements

Engage: Reach out to different cultural groups and communities within the school to encourage diverse participation and food representation. Connect with local businesses for potential donations of drinks, paper goods, or activity prizes

Time required:

- Half a day

What do I need?

- Space for gathering food & people
- Tables & chairs
- Staff or volunteer for supervision, set up, and organization
- Planning & coordination help
- Supplies (e.g., napkins, plates, utensils)

Community Potluck



WHY DO IT?

- Meal sharing is closely related to some measures of social connectedness. Countries where people share more meals have **higher levels of social support** and positive reciprocity, and **lower levels of loneliness**.
 - Sharing meals is an exceptionally strong indicator of subjective wellbeing – on par with income and unemployment. Those who share more meals with others report significantly **higher levels of life satisfaction** and positive affect, and lower levels of negative affect. This is true across ages, genders, countries, cultures, and regions.
-

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Include food options that can accommodate dietary restrictions (e.g., gluten-free, vegan, dairy-free, etc)
- Communicate that not all attendees need to bring food (extra food can be provided by the school or local businesses)
- Ensure that space for potluck is accessible
- Can be linked to cultural celebrations and traditions
- Can be linked to culinary class projects/clubs and to local community garden programming.

How to get youth involved?

- Involve youth in the planning committee
- Coordinate with student clubs or sports teams who might want to help with setting up, entertainment (e.g. talent showcase) or activities (e.g. for younger siblings) or use as fundraising opportunity
- Youth can reach out to local businesses for donations of food, or towards a draw

Morning Meal Club



WHAT IS IT?

Students arrive early to **prepare and share a meal**, such as pancakes, **fostering community** through service and shared experiences.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Decide on the days and frequency; choose the menu - if possible, include local produce, for instance by partnering with local farmers, or leveraging a school or community garden. On the day of the event, students arrive before the school start time to cook the food. Breakfast is open to all! Students can also help with the clean-up, including all breakfast attendees, not only the club members.

Logistics: Use the club meeting for buying the ingredients or connecting with existing school structures that manage the food orders. Club members can also prepare games/icebreakers for the breakfast gatherings, and discuss more broadly about food & social connectedness (e.g., read articles, guest speakers, etc).

Engage: Help the students organize the club and support them in leading the planning and delivering the collective breakfast events.

Time required:

- 2 hours

What do I need?

- Ingredients
- Space for serving the meals
- School kitchen
- Staff coordination and supervision (could include volunteers from the community)

Morning Meal Club



WHY DO IT?

- Food programs in schools **increase access to nutritious meals, develop food skills, and connect youth to local food systems.** Positive experiences with growing, preparing, and eating food enhance food literacy and contribute to **physical and mental wellbeing.**
- Students who eat breakfast regularly enjoy greater odds of **higher school connectedness and academic performance** than those who eat breakfast on a less regular basis.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Include food options that can accommodate dietary restrictions (e.g., gluten-free, vegan, dairy-free, etc)
- Can be more intentionally articulated with food programs to ensure access to affordable meals.
- Can be a one-time event, planned as a special meal for the school community. Alternatively, it can be an ongoing activity, organized to catalyze engagement, with food at the centre.
- Can be combined with activities related to community gardens.
- Can include games and other social activities during the breakfast gatherings

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can lead the activity (planning, cooking, serving meal, facilitating social activities)

Female Empowerment Group



WHAT IS IT?

The female empowerment group is a **student-led space** where youth self-identifying as girls work together to **build confidence and leadership skills**, and explore contemporary issues affecting their identities and experiences. The group operates through co-created activities, including visits with female community leaders, self-directed project-based learning, and activism addressing school inequalities. Students and teachers interact as equals, with all programming developed collaboratively based on participants' social and cultural contexts.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Secure administrative support and a dedicated meeting space that feels safe. Recruit staff members trained in critical pedagogy principles to facilitate. Have initial weekly sessions that students can attend before committing. Co-design group purpose, rules and activities with interested students. Co-plan mix of discussion, practical activities, external visits, and project work.

Logistics: Develop promotion materials and launch recruitment, host information sessions.

Engage: Build links between the group and the broader school community. Develop connections with local female leaders and community organizations willing to engage and provide opportunities for connection, learning and skill application. Develop communication channels (e.g., website/social media).

Time required:

- Weekly sessions throughout the year

What do I need?

- Facilitators (teachers)
- Classroom space,
- Trips/ activities
- Project-based learning opportunities

Female Empowerment Group



WHY DO IT?

The Female Empowerment Group was initially developed to re-engage female students that were at risk in school. Students who participated showed **improved attendance**, greater **self-confidence**, stronger **peer and adult relationships**, increased **classroom engagement**, and greater sense of **school belonging**.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Can be extended to other subpopulations.
- Group activities can be designed to inform school actions and decisions to foster greater equity, connection, and belonging within the school community.

How to get youth involved?

- Involve youth in planning
- Youth can shape the purpose, rules and activities.
- Youth can take on leadership roles like organizing events or leading a discussion.
- Youth can provide input on school inequalities and be part of creating change.

Student Interest-Driven Social Activities



WHAT IS IT?

Weekly social activities offered by the school tailored to **student interests** eg. sports, arts, clubs, games etc. May be offered weekly and/or during long breaks. Aim to **promote inclusion, engagement and connection**.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Identify student interest in sports, clubs, games, and creative activities; include options for all skill levels to ensure inclusivity for students of all abilities, cultures, and genders. Decide the days and frequency.

Logistics: Secure spaces & materials; reserve indoor and outdoor areas like gyms, fields, classrooms, and foyers; gather equipment and supplies tailored to each activity (e.g., sports gear, art materials). Promote the initiative through school channels, including classroom announcements.

Engage: Recruit staff & volunteers, involve teachers, youth leaders, and community volunteers to supervise and facilitate; engage students in leadership roles. Throughout the sessions, collect feedback from students and staff to refine offerings; adjust schedules, formats, or support based on participation and engagement levels.

Time required:

- Variable; 1-2 hours, weekly; Time for organization, leadership and student sign-up

What do I need?

- Indoor/outdoor activity space
- Materials based on the activity
- Leadership support
- Staff or volunteer supervision
- Planning and coordination assistance

Student Interest-Driven Social Activities



WHY DO IT?

- Participation in weekly student interest-driven social activities can foster **social connection**, **school belonging**, and **peer support** by engaging students in **shared pursuits** like intramural sports and choral programs.
 - Student interest-driven social activities can create **inclusive spaces** that strengthen **collaboration**, peer support, school belonging and **social networks**.
-

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Include options for all skill levels to ensure inclusivity for students of all abilities, cultures, and genders.
- Can be linked with other social connection initiatives such as a Choral Program; Board Game Gatherings; Clubs/Sports for various ability levels; and Long break activities

How to get youth involved?

- Involve youth in planning
- Youth can survey peers to determine interests and decide activities
- Youth can take leadership roles in planning and implementing activities

Peer interviews (using questions to increase connectedness)



WHAT IS IT?

Peer interviews is a **structured pair activity** where students **take turns asking progressively deeper questions**. In this case, questions that increase social connections are used to build **trust, empathy, and new friendships** across racial, ethnic, or social lines. This activity can be easily woven into school and classroom activities. As an example, having two 30-minute Peer Interview sessions early in the year can help **promote inclusivity and build classroom community**.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Students pick a partner, preferably a peer they don't know well and from a different background. During the activity, they take turns asking questions that help them learn about each other.

Logistics: Pairs meet for about 30 minutes to talk, during class or lunch.

Engage: Students use a pre-set list of questions, or can create questions that are relevant to their interests. Participants are encouraged to only share what feels comfortable. There can be adult facilitators who help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to listen and talk.

Time required:

- 30 minutes, twice

What do I need?

- Adult facilitator
- Questions

Peer interviews (with questions to increase connectedness)



WHY DO IT?

- Peer interviews can **foster empathy, trust, and emotional bonds** through structured, reciprocal conversations
 - Students can build **deeper relationships across diverse backgrounds** by asking and answering meaningful questions
 - This simple practice **expands social networks, reduces isolation**, and promotes a culture of care and inclusion
-

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Can be combined with different initiatives, as a strategy to promote conversation and discussion on a variety of topics. For instance, questions can be created focusing on relevant societal issues (e.g., health and education), or the design of school and community spaces.
- Ideas for questions and adaptations can be found at:
https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/36-questions-to-help-kids-make-friends/#tab_2

How to get youth involved?

- Involve youth in designing questions

Connecting Community Fair



WHAT IS IT?

This lunchtime initiative brings **community organizations into high school** foyers, where **students engage with services** such as Youth Outreach, Public Health, and local First Nations through activities, giveaways, and education. Mental health promotion can be an optional focus, helping connect students with available supports in a familiar, accessible setting.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Begin planning 6-8 weeks in advance. Choose a lunchtime or other high-traffic period to maximize student engagement. Recruit support staff – school VPs can lead the initiative and, ideally, teachers, volunteers, and student leaders can also support. Invite community partners, such as youth outreach, public health, mental health services, recreation centres, and local First Nations groups. Ask community partners to plan ways to make their table engaging to students (e.g., fun activities, snacks, and giveaways).

Logistics: Reserve the school foyer, gym, or outdoor area for interactive booths and activities. Use posters, PA announcements, social media, and school newsletters to build excitement. On the day of the event, arrange tables, signage, materials, and any tech needs. Ensure accessibility and flow of foot traffic.

Engage: Support youth to host a youth led event, youth-led booths, or have youth help with the organization & set-up.

Time required:

- 2 hours (lunch time + 30 minutes for set-up); can happen over different days, so it's less crowded.

What do I need?

- Communication with school and community groups
- Community involvement
- Planning support
Supportive adult facilitator
- Foyer and tables
- Channels for advertising

Connecting Community Fair



WHY DO IT?

Connecting community fairs can **promote youth engagement, peer support, and trusted relationships with caring adults**. Research shows that integrating mental health promotion in schools can **improve access to care, reduce stigma, and foster early intervention**. When students participate in youth-led activities and interact with local service providers, they are more likely to feel **emotionally safe**, build **communication skills**, and **seek help** when needed. These inclusive events create opportunities for connection, **strengthen school belonging**, and **support mental wellness** through meaningful engagement with community partners

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Option to address: Gender-diverse youth, youth involved with mental illness and substance use
- Can be thematic and include Mental Health Promotion Days
- Can promote third spaces available in the community

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can host a youth led event, youth-led booths, and help with the organization & set-up.

Weekly Mental Health / Connection Block



WHAT IS IT?

A **weekly block** where students and staff **choose from a variety of active or artistic activities**, often **led by community members**. Options can include basketball, bracelet making, playing crib, and nature grounding. Local seniors can also join and share their skills (e.g., teaching crocheting and knitting), creating meaningful intergenerational connections.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Identify leaders, including community partners with relevant expertise, services, and resources to support a variety of activities.

Logistics: Select a consistent weekly time slot that fits within the school schedule.

Engage: Engage youth in planning. Gather feedback from participants to refine and improve weekly offerings, ensuring the block remains responsive and meaningful.

Time required:

- One block, weekly over the school year

What do I need?

- Adult facilitator;
- Activity materials, as required
- Community involvement

Weekly Mental Health / Connection Block



WHY DO IT?

Weekly Mental Health / Connection Blocks **strengthen community connections** by bringing together students, staff, and invested adults in **shared activities** that build **trust, belonging, and emotional wellbeing**. These safe spaces support **meaningful relationships** and learning, while sports, arts, and nature experiences foster **intergenerational connection**. Educators can openly discuss mental health, share resources, and reduce stigma, promoting a culture of support and resilience.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Choose a diverse range of activities, such as artistic, physical, meditative, identity-based, and social.
- Involve students in the planning process to ensure relevance and engagement.
- Prioritize inclusivity by creating trauma-informed, culturally safe spaces that welcome all identities.
- Can be run as a Rainbows and Allies weekly lunch hour meeting led by SOGI leads

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can assist with planning, leadership and peer mentorship within sessions

Oasis Room



WHAT IS IT?

The Oasis Room provides a **safe space** and supportive structures **within the school environment** where **vulnerable young people could go to retreat** and re-group during unstructured parts of the school day. In this space designated for students with ASD and other vulnerabilities, ‘friendly adults’ oversee their interactions and develop structured activities, aiming to support their social and personal development. The room may have a timetable to share school events and news.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Secure administrative support and funding; Design and furnish the space (with student input), have flexible zones for different activities. Include sensory tools (fidgets, weighted blankets, calming visuals).

Logistics: Identify a room that is accessible but quiet; organize appropriate staffing and schedule.

Engage: Educate school community about the space's purpose and benefits; Create awareness of the Oasis Room among students with ASD and other vulnerabilities. Students can be connected to this resource through school counsellors and other school community members.

Time required:

- Year-long

What do I need?

- School room
- School staff
- Information sheets
- Activities
- iPad/laptop
- Whiteboard for use as a visual timetable to keep students abreast of events taking place in the school during the week.

Oasis Room



WHY DO IT?

A comprehensive scoping review of 23 studies found that safe spaces, primarily within schools, offered youth mental health support, resources, and guidance. Positive outcomes included **reduced posttraumatic stress disorders, anxiety, and substance use**, along with **improved mental well-being** and **interpersonal relationships**.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Can be a more general 'chill space' that is open to all students
- Offer quiet, structured activities to engage students in this space and prevent it from becoming unused.

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can design the space. They can be invited to submit ideas for the design of this room and be involved in its creation.

Real Acts of Caring



WHAT IS IT?

Real Acts of Caring (RAC) is about **doing something caring and kind for another for the simple joy of helping others**, and not expecting anything back. RAC was created by students at Central Community School in Port Coquitlam in 2005 and has since spread to many other communities in British Columbia and beyond. The RAC website provides many examples of how students can lead or partake in RAC, including having RAC clubs, lesson plans, ideas for Acts of Caring developed by students. Each year, there is a ‘RAC Week’, a kindness pep rally where students and special guests share the **science behind kindness**, examples of **ways to be kind**, reflect on the **impact of kindness** and facilitate sharing from students across the province.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Brainstorm ideas for helpful activities students can do for staff members, fellow students, and the broader school community. Look at the RAC website for youth-developed ideas. Collectively put a few chosen ideas into action, and de-brief the experiences .

Logistics: Plan a ‘RAC Week’ - a dedicated week for focused caring and kindness activities throughout your school.

Engage: Have simple conversations with students about unexpected acts of kindness. Encourage students to think bigger by planning acts of caring for the wider community, such as visiting elderly homes, paying for strangers' coffee, opening doors for people, or handing out flowers and handmade cards. Consider sponsoring a RAC club, or having students start one.

Time required:

- Variable

What do I need?

- Resources vary according to the strategy promoted – many do not require any additional resources.
- RAC Week requires a sponsor.

Real Acts of Caring



WHY DO IT?

- Acts of kindness **reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety** while showing greater benefits for social connection than traditional therapy techniques.
 - Random acts of kindness **trigger oxytocin release**, boosting **self-esteem, optimism, and heart health**
 - Student-led kindness interventions significantly boost high school students' wellbeing, with participants showing **higher happiness, resilience, and reduced anxiety** during weeks with more kind acts.
-

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- The RAC concept could be applied to existing clubs or leadership classes.
- Instead of a RAC Week the school could organize RAC days throughout the year
- Lesson plans and activities on kindness that can be integrated into teaching
- Ideas can be found at: <http://www.realactsofcaring.org/rac-ideas.html>

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can develop and lead the implementation of RAC ideas

Participatory Music Groups



WHAT IS IT?

Elective **music and dance groups**, involving choral and instrumental activities and a variety of dance forms. Students participate in **creative development, rehearsal, and performance**, including the choice of music and dance activities.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Consider the preferred format (drop-in, or regular practices); Recruit an adult who could be the music and/or dance instructor.

Logistics: Drop-in sessions activities may include open jam sessions, casual dance circles, improv games, and collaborative songwriting; If the group is doing a performance, plan the date and engage students according to their interests (music, dance, and also event-planning, costume design, etc).

Engage: Engage students in planning the sessions, including repertoire selection.

Time required:

- Weekly/ Monthly time slots

What do I need?

- Resources vary: Music/ dance leads/ instructors
- Practice and performance space
- Instruments

Participatory Music Groups



WHY DO IT?

Participation in music activities **promotes social connection and wellbeing** by creating **shared experiences, emotional bonds, and a sense of collective identity**. It reinforces **cultural traditions**, offers purpose through performance, and fosters **belonging** in supportive group settings. Music groups provide **emotional support, reduce loneliness**, and encourage mutual care. They also expand social networks and help develop new relationships and social skills.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Adopt a drop-in, low-commitment model, so students can engage at their own pace.
- Plan the activities and repertoires to include various levels of skills and existing experience
- Provide opportunities for students to share their culture & traditions, bringing traditional instruments, music, etc. This is relevant for all students in the school community but can be an especially interesting initiative for newcomer youth.
- Offer as drop-in, low barrier, low commitment sessions (e.g., open jam sessions, informal dance circle, collaborative songwriting) or ongoing sessions, with a fixed group, that could work on a larger project (e.g., a final presentation at a school event, etc), or not

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can support choice of music, activity, rehearsal, and overall organization of the group & performance.

Peer Mentoring



WHAT IS IT?

Students are paired across grades to **support connection** during breaks and transitions.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Designate adult facilitators and how students will be paired (i.e. is there a specific goal? For example, high school transition). If necessary, create a survey to gather additional information about the students to support their matching. Co-plan the meetings with mentors and co-create group contracts with all students; create feedback mechanisms. Sessions can alternate between group-based and pair-based activities; can also include unstructured time.

Logistics: Advertise the project to potential student mentors and mentees. Consider food for the meetings (especially the first few), icebreakers (e.g., check-in, intros, human bingo). Share in advance the schedule of meetings to make sure both mentors and mentees can attend.

Engage: Train student mentors (e.g., discuss the goals of the project; tips to support students; what to do if they encounter a situation they need additional support, etc).

Time required:

- Weekly/Monthly

What do I need?

- Space
- Adult facilitator
- Materials for activities as needed

Peer Mentoring



WHY DO IT?

Peer relationships can **promote healthier behaviours**, and **improve social competence and life satisfaction**. School-based mentoring programmes can be effective in encouraging **school engagement**, particularly during times of vulnerability such as the transition to secondary school. Evidence suggests that peer mentorship programs can support structurally underserved youth. For instance, experiences involving newcomer mentees have shown potential in improving their **social confidence**, while mentors developed **leadership skills and greater empathy for their peers**. Peer support arrangements have also increased social interactions and engagement for high school students with ASD in general education settings, even without additional special education staff.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Consider adaptations required for including youth with disabilities, newcomer youth, etc. This includes training for mentors.
- Provide sign-up, with the possibility of students opting out, in case there's no good fit between mentors and mentees
- Provide peer mentoring for high school transitions, in which junior students are paired with senior students; for newcomer youth (could pair students from the same grade or across grades); for new students (could pair students from the same grade or across grades)
- Consider including physical activity, outdoor time, or activities with the community garden and other school clubs

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can act as student mentors; youth can help plan sessions and activities.

Community Garden Programming



WHAT IS IT?

Creation of a **community garden** with systems and activities to regularly **engage students in the outdoor space**.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Choose a model: mentorship, instructor-based, or student clubs. Plan activities - consider produce cultivation (e.g., soil and bed preparation, transplanting, seeding, weeding, irrigating, harvesting, trellising, and cultural pest management practice) and distribution (e.g., cooking activities, distribution to food programs, partnership with school groups, farmers market). Create strategies for the winter months and outline plans for maintaining the garden during the summer, when students and staff are away.

Logistics: Select the garden site(s) and secure necessary resources.

Engage: Instructors, mentors, partners and youth. Instructors/mentors/partners ideally have experience in gardening, education, and youth development - assess what specific training, orientation, and support for the partners are needed. Mentors can be responsible for small groups of youth (6-7). Find partners in the community (e.g., existing groups running gardens, youth employment & volunteering organizations, etc) .

Time required:

- Ongoing over the school year

What do I need?

- Adult facilitators
- Community involvement
- Garden-related supplies & tools
- Garden

Community Garden Programming



WHY DO IT?

Community gardening programs can provide the community with fresh and affordable vegetables, as well as preserve the public space, and engage the youth in **community development**. Research shows that participation in cultivating, harvesting, and assisting the local farmers market may increase youth's **sense of self and identity, food, and interpersonal skills**. The gardens provide a **safe space** in the community where youth can **interact with peers and trusted adults**. Participation also enhances **youth personal connection to and awareness of their local food system**.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Consider the garden's location and ensure accessibility for all students, including transit availability and cost
- Offer the garden program as an extracurricular activity, supported by both school and community partners
- Allow the initiative to be led by a student gardening club to encourage ownership and leadership
- Include a peer mentoring component to foster skill-sharing and inclusive participation
- Coordinate or combine activities with the Morning Meal Club initiative to build continuity and shared engagement
- More ideas can be found at: <https://farmtoschoolbc.ca/about/> & <https://riseup-phabc.ca/>

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can lead the garden programming.

On the Land Programs



WHAT IS IT?

On the land programs where **Indigenous youth go to do outdoor education**, with **Elders** present to hold the circle and support group discussions.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Explore a variety of program ideas that support youth cultural identity and connection. Ideas of existing programs include subsistence living skills; recreation; equine experience; community events and gatherings; Elder knowledge sharing; spiritual practices; celebrations and feasts; talking circles or group discussions; arts and crafts; community service; formal curriculum and/or lessons; and cultural activities.

Logistics: Select culturally significant, safe, and accessible sites; coordinate transportation; gather any necessary supplies.

Engage: Build relationships with local First Nations and Indigenous organizations; partner to implement initiatives.

Time required:

- Year-long

What do I need?

- Community involvement
- Materials for activities as needed

On the Land Programs



WHY DO IT?

Programs that build **youth leadership, cultural identity, and connectedness** have shown promise in **enhancing youth wellbeing, resilience, and engagement**. Overall, prioritizing **relationships, cultural strengths, and community** capacity-building are key to supporting youth wellness promotion. Reconnecting youth with their cultural heritage, spiritual practices, Elders, and traditional knowledge fosters a **sense of identity, belonging, and self-continuity**, which supports resilience. Studies on outdoor and land-based initiatives for Indigenous youth have found positive impacts on participants' self-esteem and mental health; **connections to culture, cultural pride, and identity**; and **connections to community** including peers and Elders.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

Duration of initiative can vary from 1-day activity to ongoing yearlong sessions.

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can co-create the initiative with community members

After School Space



WHAT IS IT?

An after-school space where youth can hang out; a risk-free zone for young people to be themselves or to talk about what's on their minds. If funding permits, the zone includes food and activities.

HOW TO DO IT?

Organize: Identify spaces available in the school community (at the school and in the neighbourhood) - e.g., libraries, community centres, underused school rooms, etc.

Logistics: Adult support (e.g., volunteers), training (e.g., trauma-informed practices and emergency procedures), materials available, food programs, cultural events, and hours of operation.

Engage: Partner with community organizations. Engage with youth to co-design the space and co-plan the rules (e.g., create a working group, conduct surveys, consultations...)

Time required:

- Structural intervention

What do I need?

- Space
- Furniture to make the space comfortable and welcoming (e.g., couches, decoration)
- Miscellaneous materials (e.g., arts & craft, games, books)

After School Space



WHY DO IT?

Social environments and built environments are interconnected. Safe "third spaces" can lead to **positive impacts on social health, quality of life and wellbeing: social interaction, and community belonging**. A study with university students in Canada has found that students studying coffeeshops and libraries felt an increase sense of social connection.

IDEAS & ADAPTATIONS

- Co-design the space with youth to ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance
- Offer food to support youth experiencing food insecurity
- Include flexible timing to accommodate different schedules
- If using school space, involve community partners to create a safer, more neutral environment
- Consider off-site locations with attention to transit access, affordability, and safety
- Ensure the space addresses systemic barriers such as racism and sexism
- Allow youth to lead or co-create activities and programming
- Include discussions and talks on topics that interest students
- Combine with food programs to increase engagement and support
- Explore hybrid models during lunch or break periods
- Include outdoor space options for comfort and variety
- Prioritize community-led management, even within school facilities
- Design with accessibility in mind for all youth, especially marginalized groups

How to get youth involved?

- Youth can help organize and decorate the space.
- Youth can co-create the rules of utilization of the space

Appendix:

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