

STUDENT VOICES SHAPING SCHOOL WELLNESS

Wellness
Innovation Lab

PART 1

INTRODUCTION
TO THE WELLNESS
INNOVATION LAB
FOR SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY LEADERS



- PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE WELLNESS INNOVATION LAB FOR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
- PART 2: IMPLEMENTATION AND FACILITATION GUIDE FOR WORKSHOP LEADERS
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This Introduction is Part 1 of a 3-Part Wellness Innovation Lab (WIL) resource designed to support Community Development Agents, CLC Principals, school teams, and community stakeholders in preparing, running, and sustaining the Wellness Innovation Lab in their schools and communities

What is a Wellness Innovation Lab (WIL)?

The Wellness Innovation Lab (WIL) is a dynamic, student-centered initiative designed to improve mental health and well-being in schools. It brings together students, educators, and community members in a structured, creative environment to co-design solutions that directly address the mental wellness needs of the school community.

At its heart, a Wellness Innovation Lab is an immersive Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) experience, powered by the principles of design thinking - empathy, problem-definition, ideation, prototyping, and testing. Rather than teaching SEL skills in abstract or isolation, the Wellness Innovation Lab integrates them into a meaningful, real-world innovation process. Students aren't just learning about collaboration, empathy, and leadership – they're practicing them by tackling real issues that affect their daily school life.

WHY DO A WIL?

A Wellness Innovation Lab offers schools a unique opportunity to:

- Deepen student engagement through meaningful participation.
- Strengthen emotional intelligence and empathy across the school community.
- Develop wellness initiatives that are authentic, sustainable, and shaped by real student and staff experiences.
- Boost overall school culture by aligning wellness strategies with lived realities

OBJECTIVES OF A WIL

The Wellness Innovation Lab is designed to:

- Center student voice in the co-creation of wellness strategies.
- Create inclusive spaces where diverse perspectives drive creativity and collaboration.
- Inspire practical, innovative actions that support both student and staff mental health.
- Strengthen connections and a shared sense of ownership over wellness in the school.
- Cultivate a stronger culture of empathy and connection within schools.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A stronger school culture of empathy and connection.
- Prototypes and initiatives that reflect real student needs.
- A framework for sustained wellness innovation beyond the initial workshop.



Research Behind the Wellness Innovation Lab:

Social Emotional Learning & Design Thinking

Inspired by the McConnell Foundation's [WellAhead Social Innovation Initiative](#), the Wellness Innovation Lab was designed to incorporate a systems-thinking, human-centered approach to school-based mental health and well-being. Additional resources were consulted, including the [Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance](#), and research from the University of British Columbia, [Promoting Mental Well-Being Through Social-Emotional Learning in Schools](#). Development of the Wellness Innovation Lab is a shift towards a more collaborative, equity-driven, and systems-focused approach, grounded in design thinking and emphasizing social and emotional learning (SEL).

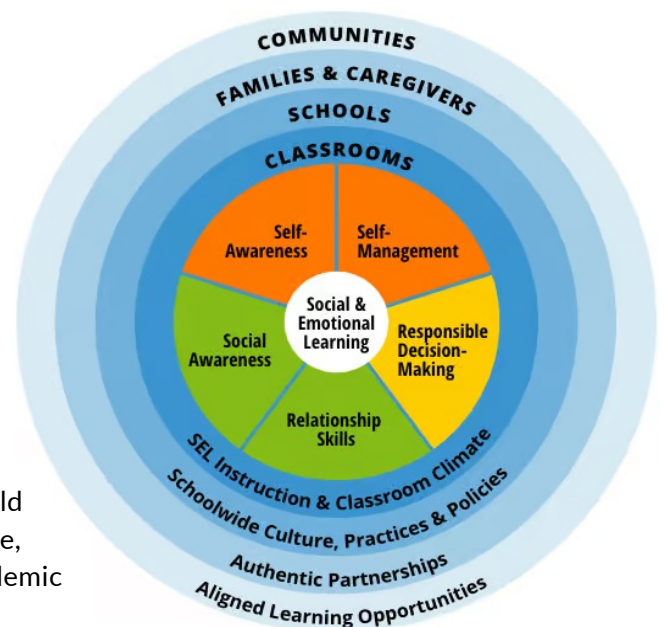
Design Thinking is a mindset and approach to learning, collaboration, and problem solving. In practice, the design process is a structured framework for identifying challenges, gathering information, generating potential solutions, refining ideas, and testing solutions. Design Thinking can be flexibly implemented; serving equally well as a framework for a course design or a roadmap for an activity or group project. [Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)

The Wellness Innovation Lab (WIL) is rooted in collaboration, empathy, and learning by doing. It helps schools and communities co-create meaningful, locally grounded solutions that support student and community well-being by guiding participants through a structured innovation process:

- Empathize – Understand others' perspectives.
- Define – Clearly identify a problem to solve.
- Ideate – Brainstorm as many ideas as possible.
- Prototype – Create rough models of promising ideas.
- Test – Gather feedback and refine the prototypes.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL): The Wellness Innovation Lab is grounded in the [CASEL framework](#), which identifies five core competencies essential for well-being and success:

The CASEL framework is used in education to help understand how students acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, set and achieve personal and collective goals, show empathy for others, build and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible, caring decisions - key competencies that support both academic success and overall well-being.



The Wellness Innovation Lab aligns with [CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) framework](#), as it supports the development of all five core SEL competencies.

- **Self-Awareness:** During this initial stage, participants are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences related to wellness in school. Students identify what wellness means to them personally and articulate how school policies and environments impact their mental and emotional state.
- **Self-Management:** The Wellness Innovation Lab experience builds self-regulation, motivation, and resilience. As students move through ideation and prototyping, they practice setting goals, managing frustration, and pushing through uncertainty—essential aspects of emotional and cognitive regulation.
- **Social Awareness:** Empathy is a foundational part of the Wellness Innovation Lab. Participants actively listen to others' experiences and perspectives to define shared wellness challenges. This builds compassion and appreciation for diversity in lived experiences.
- **Relationship Skills:** The Wellness Innovation Lab is deeply collaborative. Students work in mixed teams to brainstorm, build, and test ideas, which requires communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** Throughout the Wellness Innovation Lab, students evaluate the consequences of their ideas and make choices about how their solutions might impact others. Students weigh options, prioritize actions, and make informed decisions about what ideas to implement.

In short, the Wellness Innovation Lab and the CASEL framework go hand-in-hand to help students grow into well-rounded individuals. The WIL's hands-on activities build the key skills CASEL talks about – things like understanding themselves, managing their feelings, connecting with others, working together, and making good choices.



