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Dear Parent or Guardian,

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Schools are always working to make safe and inviting learning environments for students and staff. One way to measure the effectiveness of our efforts is to ask students questions about their experiences with bullying, discrimination, and their perceptions of the school environment, as well as their thoughts and feelings about their health and behaviour. Toward this aim, Dr. Vaillancourt and her research team at uOttawa will be conducting a study in partnership with School Mental Health Ontario called the *Health and Peer Relations Study* (www.hprs.ca). Some of the questions in this study were designed to meet data collection requirements of the Ministry of Education.

Participation in the study is voluntary and it is up to you to decide if you want your child to participate. Your child's participation (yes or no) will have no impact on their activities, relationships, or learning opportunities. We fully respect your family's decision regarding your child's participation. If you do not want your child to participate or if your child doesn't want to participate, students will be directed to work quietly or read until other students are finished.

What will happen during the study?

In this study, students in Grades 4 to 12 will be asked questions about their safety, bullying, relationships, health, and behaviour (e.g., screen time use, physical activity). We estimate that it will take about 25 minutes for the youngest students to complete the survey (during school hours). Your child will also be asked some questions such as their age and cultural background, but they will not provide their name so their answers will remain anonymous. Before your child is given the survey, their teacher will read instructions about the survey out loud, which includes information about their rights as participants, such as their right to skip questions and their right to not participate. A study information letter will also be provided to your child along with a letter on how to access help if they need it. These information letters will be provided to all students.

Who will know what my child said in the survey?

Your child's answers will be anonymous—nobody will know who they are and what they said. It is up to your child to decide if they'd like to share any demographic information (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.). The school/school board will receive broad results about your school as a whole; there is no way for them to identify your child or any other student. The information that your child provides will be combined with that of other students and will be stored securely on the board's network and at uOttawa. The findings will be used to produce reports for HWDSB schools that will help them to plan or revise their Mental Health and Wellbeing and Safe School initiatives. The findings will also be used for scientific publications (such as in journals and in conference presentations) to help other schools in Canada and around the world learn about

when and where students feel safe at school and best practice strategies for helping to improve students' relationships with other students and staff and their health. In these publications, no student or school will ever be identified— we are only interested in how all students, together, answered the questions in the survey.

Because your child will complete the survey in a classroom with their peers, we cannot guarantee that other students will not see some of your child's answers. To reduce this risk, we will provide instructions about privacy.

Will this study be on-going and how do you protect my child's anonymity?

We plan to collect data again in 2027 and 2028, and will formally request your consent at each time point.

We would like to ask students the same questions over the next few years and combine their responses over time— without ever using their names. To do this, we've created a special code that is unique to each student. This code uses probabilities (math) to link responses across surveys while protecting students' identities. We also use school codes rather than school names so that we cannot identify students. Although the school board holds the key needed to match the school codes with the school names, they do not have access to the students' responses to the identity questions used to create the anonymous student code. Your child's information is anonymous to both the school and the researchers (i.e., while the school will have access to some data, they will not have students' unique identifiers; and while the researchers will have student identifiers, they will not have school information). This information barrier between us and the school board ensures that all responses remain truly anonymous. We also take one extra step before sharing results with the school board. We remove information from very small groups (i.e., groups with less than 10 students) to again make sure students cannot be identified.

Are there good things and bad things about the survey?

Although no risks are anticipated for completing the survey, if your child feels uncomfortable answering any of the questions, they can either skip the question or can stop entirely without giving a reason. They will then be asked to do some reading or a learning task until the class has finished the survey. Students are encouraged to reach out to a trusted adult (e.g., parent/guardian) and/or a school social worker at school if they have found that the survey content made them feel uncomfortable, emotionally distressed, or triggered.

Where will my child's data (answers) be kept?

All the information collected will be stored in Dr. Vaillancourt's laboratory at uOttawa which is protected by a state-of-the art security system and monitored by uOttawa Protection Services. Data will be encrypted with strong password protection and securely stored on a protected laboratory computer that is located at the University of Ottawa with restricted access. Raw data are kept for 7 years following the completion of the project.

Who can I contact if I have concerns, or if I want to see the survey, or if I do not want my child to participate?

Should you have any concerns, if you would like to view the survey, or if you do not wish for your child to participate, please contact your school or the Research & Analytics Department (research@hwdsb.on.ca) Alternatively, you can access the survey at:

- <https://www.hprs.ca/survey-parent/a>
- Please use the access code: parentEN

Again, your child's participation (yes or no) will have no impact on their activities, relationships, or learning opportunities. We fully respect your decision regarding your child's participation. If you do not want your child to participate or if your child doesn't want to participate, students will be directed to work quietly or read until other students are finished.

We encourage you to discuss the survey with your child. Again, please contact us if you or your child have any concerns.

Who approved this study and who can I contact about the study?

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through uOttawa and the HWDSB. If you have questions or would like further information about this study, please contact Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt (tracy.vaillancourt@uottawa.ca). If you have any concerns about your or your child's treatment or rights as research participants, please contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research at uOttawa (ethics@uottawa.ca, 613-562-5387) or the HWDSB Review Ethics Board (reb@hwdsb.on.ca; 905-527-5092 x2120) or your school's principal.

Thank you very much for your continued interest in our school survey and for helping us to do our best to maintain a healthy, safe, and respectful environment for learning.

Sincerely,



Tracy Vaillancourt, Ph.D., uOttawa and the HWDSB

Note. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.