

# Rudjer Boskovic School Well-Being Policy

## School Mission Statement

*Rudjer Boskovic School inspires learners to become honorable, principled, knowledgeable and caring individuals, capable and willing to make considerable contributions to their local and worldwide communities.*

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## PURPOSE

We developed this policy in order to outline the procedures in Rudjer Boskovic School, enforced with the aim of supporting physical and mental wellbeing of students and teachers. We payed particular attention to the following International Baccalaureate requirements as published in Program standards and practices (2022):

Student support 3: The school fosters the social, emotional, and physical well-being of its students and teachers. (0202-03)

- *Student support 3.1: The school identifies and allocates spaces and resources to support the social, emotional, and physical well-being of its students and teachers. (0202-03-0100)*
- *Student support 3.2: The school demonstrates in its systems, processes and policies attention to the social, emotional, and physical well-being of its students and teachers. (0202-03-0200)*
- *Student support 3.3: The pedagogical leadership team and teachers support students' social, emotional and physical well-being. (0202-03-0300)*
- *Student support 3.4: The school promotes open communication based on understanding and respect. (0202-03-0400)*

Schools are places where teachers and students spend as much as 8 hours during their workdays. In addition, schools have access to most of children and young people in a country, during a critical period of their development. During this time, school actors interact with each other, work, play and build relationships, apart from teaching or developing academic skills. This is why it is necessary to pay particular attention to the physical and mental health of all school actors.

Well-being is a state where a person “realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, n.d.). World Health Organization suggests six strategies (0202-03-0200) helpful in promotion of well-being of school actors: *school-level policies, the physical environment, the social environment, the health curriculum, teacher wellbeing, and links to community and health services* (WHO, 2021). By paying attention to these strategies, we are

ensuring that clear procedures and support structures are at place when it comes to wellbeing of our students and teachers.

### **SCHOOL-LEVEL POLICIES**

As a school in the territory of Republic of Serbia, school rulebooks and policies are in line with the Serbian law. Primarily, all employees have health insurance and can seek medical help in any state funded health institution in Republic of Serbia. We have a school rulebook aimed at protecting teachers and student from harm, discrimination, violence and neglect. A school secretary with education in law develops this document and follows up on its implementation. Each year, school management and a teachers' council designates a team (one for primary and one for secondary school) to regularly discuss special activities aimed at prevention (fire drills, class observations, health check-ups) and protection of vulnerable students (for example, students who recently enrolled, students with previous health or mental health issues). This team necessarily includes the school secretary, school psychologist and the principal, as well as two subject teachers elected each school year. The team organizes emergency meetings if there are known cases of harm, discrimination, violence, bullying or neglect (for example, student self-harming, online bullying).

The Ministry of Education of Republic of Serbia has developed a portal "Čuvam te" accessible to all schools at the territory of the republic where anonymous complaints of bullying, neglect, discrimination and violence can be reported to the school's principals. It is a principal's obligation to regularly log in to the portal and check for any complaints.

In addition, in line with the IB philosophy, we have developed a complaints procedure protecting all school actors against unfair treatment, including academic and non-academic matters and SEN policy valuing specific interests, characteristics, learning styles and students' needs, protecting students from unjust treatment and discrimination.

### **SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

We intentionally develop safe spaces (*0202-03-0100*) for free expression, promotion of connectedness, acknowledgment of both positive and negative emotions and celebrations of diversity. These spaces are tailored to the students' and teachers' needs, seeing that that spend

as much as eight hours in school every work day. Aside from spacious classrooms, sports field and a balloon hall, we have spaces specifically designed to promote wellbeing.

#### **Student club and teachers' lounge**

We built two linked spaces and adjusted them specifically for non-academic purposes, encouraging the atmosphere of sharing and care. Student club and teachers' lounge are spaces where school actors can share a meal, listen to music and spend their breaks together. These two spaces are physically connected in order to promote connectedness between students and teachers and minimize the hierarchy.

#### **Psychologist office and nurse's office**

School psychologist and school nurse have isolated and private offices where students can go if they feel the need to. Both spaces are adjusted specifically for this purpose and students visiting a nurse or a psychologist can do this privately without being interrupted.

#### **Nature and sports**

Since our school is located in the Košutnjak park, we use this natural surrounding as a way of improving physical and mental health. Our teachers use nice weather conditions to give classes outside and students can spend their free time outdoors or playing sports on a basketball or a volleyball field right in the schoolyard. Physical and health education classes use this space for development of skills and improvement of health. Seeing that the school is located near nature park and lake Ada Ciganlija, we organize sports days at least twice a year and include both teachers and students in various sports activities like cycling, tennis, volleyball and water skiing. In winter months, we organize bowling days or group sports indoors since we have three fully functional indoor sports fields.

### **PEOPLE AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

All school actors, including teachers', management, caregivers and students are an important aspect of development of safe social environment for all. Well-being is a commonly raised topic and everyone is expected to take seriously the following aspects (0202-03-0400):

1. Staying kind and caring towards others in every situation, promoting the atmosphere of connectedness and tolerance.
2. Feeling free to ask for help, support or guidance.

3. Being careful, observant and efficient when it comes to providing immediate help when there is a health concern (contacting the homeroom teacher, school psychologist, school nurse, someone from management...)
4. Mental hygiene, health education and prevention. This means organization of workshops, development of useful materials, regular visitations to the psychologist's or a nurse's office, spending time in shared spaces developed for non-academic purposes.
5. Being discreet when it comes to sharing information about others.
6. Staying patient when it comes to their own and well-being of others. Acknowledging the complexity of emotions, legitimizing diverse emotions and reactions, understanding that the road to improvement is not linear.

### **Peers and friends**

Positive peer relationships are key protective factors when it comes to wellbeing. Students are encouraged to discuss openly their needs, to support each other and encourage asking for help, support or guidance when needed. Positive relationships and atmosphere of sharing and trust is promoted in class, workshops, school activities, during breaks – in lunch, while playing sports, during fieldtrips etc. If a student is concerned about a friend, they cooperate with the homeroom teacher, school nurse or a psychologist.

### **Subject teachers**

Subject teachers are the first line of prevention. Their work is regularly aimed at development of affective skills, respect, teamwork, communication and tolerance towards others. In addition, subject teachers regularly cooperate with the homeroom teacher and the school psychologist if they find any reason to be concerned for a student's adjustment or physical or mental wellbeing. Potential warning signs for mental health and neuropsychological concerns are listed in the appendix. These concerns are always raised discreetly without drawing the attention of other students.

### **Homeroom teachers**

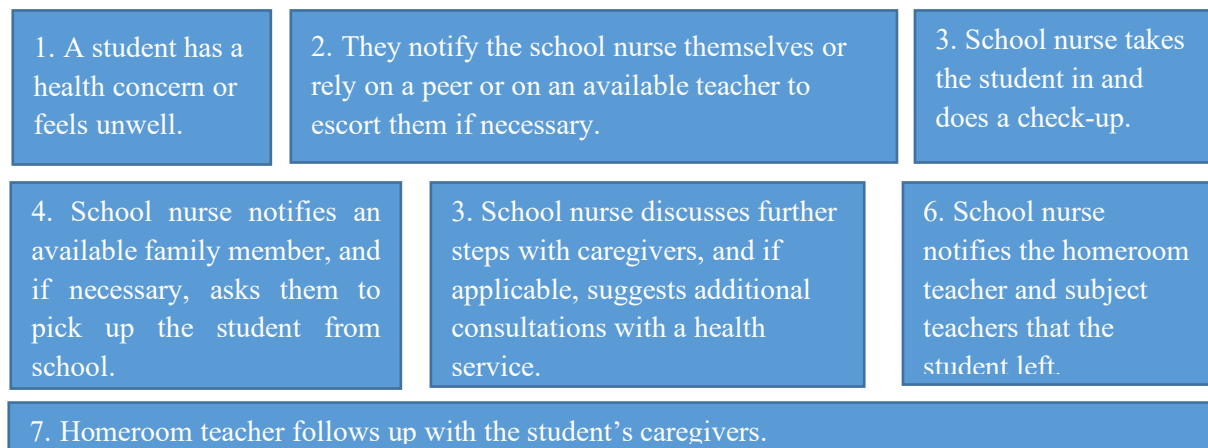
Homeroom teachers are a first point of contact for every student. Weekly meetings and regular observations, but also school trips and excursions provide homeroom teachers with valuable information about the adjustment and well-being of students. In addition, homeroom meetings are used for discussion and development of crucial skills for well-being. If a

homeroom teacher raises a concern about these issues, they are obliged to notify a school psychologist or a school nurse and regularly cooperate with the student’s caregivers.

**School nurse**

School nurse is a main figure engaged in care about physical health of students and teachers. Protocol for addressing health issues and reacting to health emergencies in students is outlined in Figure 1. In addition, if a teacher has a health concern or feels unwell, school nurse takes them in and gives recommendations in terms of further consultation with health services. School nurse does regular health check-ups, provides a safe space for sharing, and cooperates with homeroom teachers and the school psychologist. School nurse regularly organizes workshops aimed at raising awareness and understanding of puberty, adolescence and relevant health issues. If there are any mental health concerns (abuse of substances, self-harming...), school nurse is obliged to notify the school psychologist.

*Figure 1. Protocol for addressing health issues and reacting to health emergencies in students*

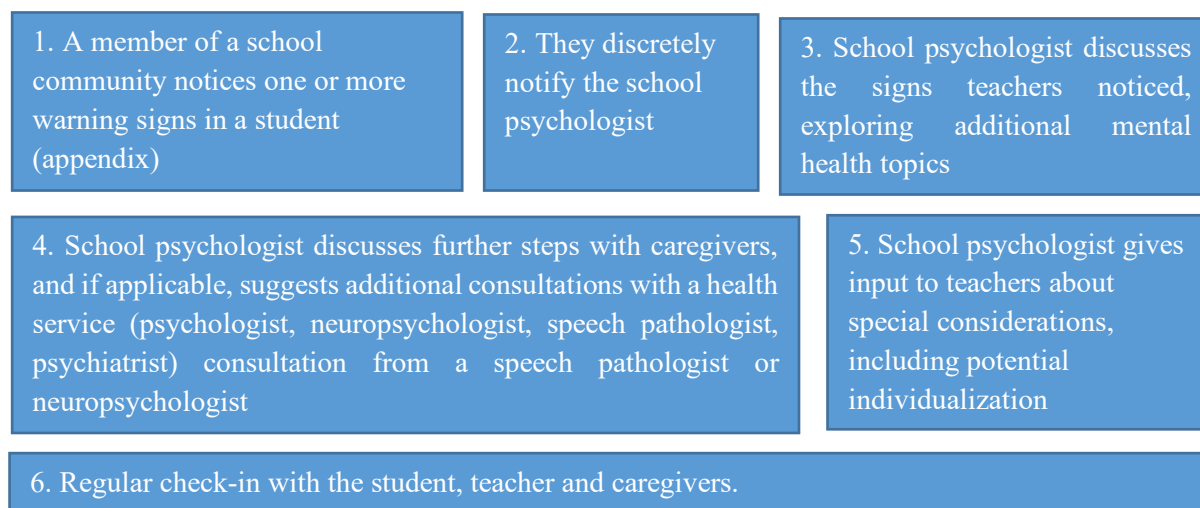


**School psychologist**

School psychologist does regular classroom observations and writes feedback to subject teachers and school principal. They also do regular checkups with students, including a necessary meeting upon admission in our school. They develop group activities and specific measures for adaptation and development of well-being of students (for example: workshops on emotional regulation; brochure on managing stress...). They collaborate with subject teachers and homeroom teachers in providing additional support to students. They promote the significance of mental health and encourage celebrations of international holidays like international mental health day or day against bullying. They meet with the students’ caregivers

in cases they feel concerned about the well-being of a student and recommend further steps. Figure 2 covers the school’s protocol for addressing psychological well-being issues and concerns.

*Figure 2. Protocol for addressing psychological well-being issues and concerns*



### **School parliament**

An active school parliament allows students to raise concerns they need and have the opportunity for decision-making. Members of the parliament are elected by their classmates each year and they choose their own representative (president). Parliament representatives communicate their demands directly with the school management. Initiatives led by student parliament proved to be an effective addition to care about well-being. They strengthened students’ agency and involvement in school life, promoted leadership and teamwork and encouraged cooperation and connectedness among students.

### **Caregivers**

Caregivers are in contact with the homeroom teachers and are being notified about any potential measure undertaken with the goal of improving adaptation and well-being of their child. They are encouraged to initiate contact and reach for support whenever they feel like they should (a meet with the psychologist, a change in classroom seating, help from a nurse). If there is a reason for serious concern (for example: self-harming, suicidal thoughts, suspicion of drug abuse) raised by the psychologist, caregivers are obliged by the law and school policies to take the necessary steps and contact mental health services.

### **Creative Activities Management**

In order for extra-curricular activities to run smoothly, the school has appointed a Creative Activities manager and Creative Activities coordinator who gather and organize teachers' ideas for activities and present them in monthly and weekly plans. They are taking care of scheduling visits and fieldtrips, organizing entrance tickets and coordinating the timetables. Figure 3 shows the protocol for organizing extra-curricular activities.

### **Technical Management**

Technical Management is supporting teachers and students by handling logistics. They are coordinating the school buses for students, transportation for extra-curricular activities, lunch boxes during field trips, large print jobs for teachers and students and making the space we work in enjoyable and easy to use.

### **School management**

School management (0202-03-0300) encourages and strongly values initiatives with the purpose of protection and improvement of students' and teacher's well-being. They promote cooperation and coordinate the workload of teaching and non-teaching staff. They bring guest lecturers to speak about reproductive health, mental health, substance abuse, sports and physical health. In addition, they support well-being of students and teachers by assuring regular breaks, spaces and time for sharing, openness and acknowledgement of emotions and yearly health-checkups for teachers and students. School management promotes regular, clear and kind communication within the school community, while insisting on clear boundaries between private and professional life.

## **HEALTH CURRICULUM**

Topics in relation to wellbeing, like protection of physical and mental health, prevention of diseases, skill development and fulfillment of potential are covered through many aspects of our curriculum. Several subjects explicitly teach about health topics and allow students to have full and correct information about their health, including reproductive and mental health. This promotes the atmosphere of critical thinking and minimizes stigma surrounding the health topics, allowing students to share their concerns. The subjects are: sociology in the national curriculum, psychology, biology, chemistry and physical and health education in both national and IB curriculum. Language classes often include topics linked to



wellbeing, like pollution, physical and mental health, exercise and nutrition, which gives students an additional, judgment-free context to learn and understand these topics. In addition, majority of subjects and activities tackle the students' role in the community and various aspects of their development. With the initiative of students and with the support of their teachers and supervisors, topics about exercise, nutrition, health and mental health are strongly encouraged as Service as Action experiences (orienteering, sports tournaments), CAS (dance classes, humanitarian fairs), and personal project (topics of stigma, mental health, stress, reaching out to psychologists). This allows students to explore their personal interests at depth and draw long lasting conclusions in relation to real-life situations.

Finally, students, teachers and management often initiate bringing in lecturers with focus on health and well-being, including expert gynecologists, crime investigators, psychologists and sociologists.

### **SKILLS FOR WELL-BEING**

Our school offers ample opportunities for development of skills for well-being. School psychologist regularly delivers lectures and workshops on resilience, emotional regulation, empathy, communication and cooperation. Guest lecturers are brought in to speak on these topics too, offered to our students and their parents.

Sports days, tournaments and competitions promotes sense of belonging, friendships and cooperation and are held multiple times per term. They also promote physical activity of students and teachers.

Volunteer work in cooperation with a Drop in Shelter in Belgrade and Day Care Center for children and youth with developmental difficulties is a regular aspect of students' CAS and Service as Action experiences. This is a valuable contribution to expanding connections to a community wider than school. In addition, humanitarian events, like book fairs and sports tournaments teach solidarity, cooperation and friendship to everyone involved and are held in our school at least twice a year.

We take seriously a need for students to find meaning and direction in life. In order to do this, we provide various opportunities for them to explore their interests and areas of life they are good at. Students participate (and organize) sports and music events in our school. We provide dance and chess classes, organize visitations to movie festivals museums and plays.

We bring guest lectures to present universities, career paths and their recent scientific findings. Finally, students go through the process of exploring their professional interests with a school psychologist.

## TEACHER WELL-BEING

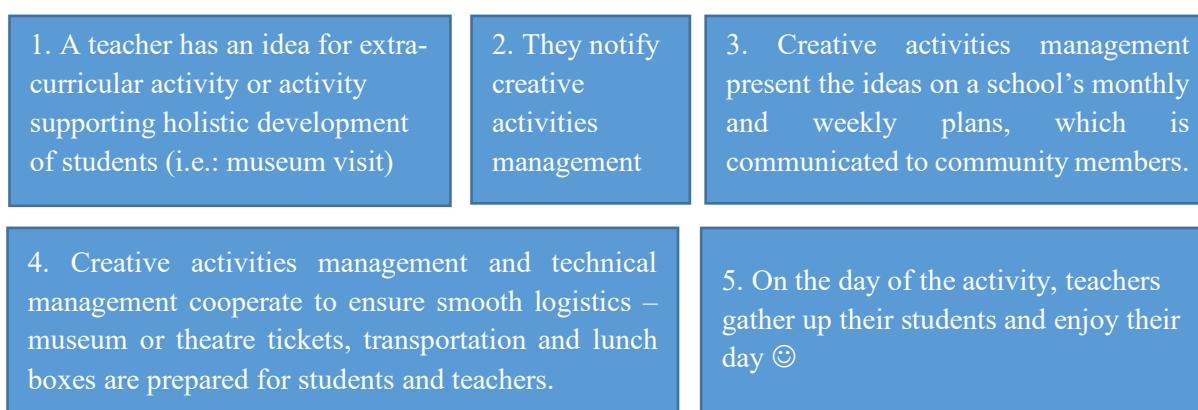
Key strategy in promoting overall well-being in schools is promoting teacher well-being. Knowing that appropriate strategies when coping with stress, strong communication skills and healthy relationships with others make resilient teachers (Howard & Johnson, 2004) we developed a set of steps in supporting them in this process. The following strategies, recognized in literature (Summerfield, 2021) as helpful for improving teachers' wellbeing are embedded in our work with teachers:

1. **Promotion of a healthy school climate and strong collegial relationships:** Teachers' have separate spaces for academic and non-academic work; bi-annual celebrations organized out of office and bi-annual office parties (New Years and end-of-school year). Coffee, milk and refreshments are always available in the homeroom and the teachers' lounge. Teachers have meetings with management and participate in yearly evaluation procedures where comments, issues and needs are freely communicated and valued.
2. **Decision-making:** all teachers have both the autonomy and support when it comes to decision making in the classroom. Unit plans and activities are planned by the teacher, however, support comes from the subject group leader, program coordinators, ATL coordinators and a school psychologist. Teacher-led initiatives are strongly valued and visible is monthly and weekly activity plans. Figure 3 covers the protocol for organizing activities beyond the curriculum.
3. **Workload:** teachers work reasonable hours with a 45-minute lunch break. Teachers are not involved in doing technical and logistical tasks. Protocol for realization of extracurricular ideas and cooperation with technical staff is outlined in Figure 3. Homeroom teachers have their work phones and families can contact them outside of workhours only in case of emergency.
4. **Support:** teachers can rely on support in many different ways. They are a part of a subject group and any issues with the program or subject can be shared with the subject

group leader or other members of the group. Concerns about school policy implementation, like assessment and SEN are typically shared with the MYP coordinator or SEN Managers. Concerns about communication, relationships with students and class activities are typically resolved in cooperation with school psychologist and ATL coordinator. Finally, concerns about space, logistics and schedules are communicated with the school management.

5. **Competence and self-efficacy:** teachers are given opportunities for professional development regularly. These can be a result of a management initiative but teachers are encouraged to look for and apply for seminars or workshops they feel are useful. We encourage participating in workshops and seminars linked to the IB, but also in relation to development of pedagogical skills of teachers. In addition, we organize internal workshops focused on communication, providing feedback, respecting boundaries and skills during every term.
6. **Organization:** with the support of coordinators and a school psychologist, teachers develop unit plans before the beginning of a school year in order to minimize unpredictable situations during a school year. Monthly plans for extra-curricular activities are prepared in cooperation with practical management.
7. **Strategies and resources:** teachers are encouraged to share their worries and seek for support and help when faced with difficulties. Resources aimed at developing personally significant strategies for reducing stress are regularly shared by the school psychologist.

*Figure 3. Protocol for realization of extracurricular ideas and cooperation with technical staff*



## **LINKS TO COMMUNITY AND HEALTH SERVICES**

We encourage well-being through prevention and care when concerns are raised. We have regular cooperation (0202-03-0100) with the health center located on the same district as our school, which provides yearly health checkups for teachers (organized by the school's management). Once again, all employees have health insurance.

We have guest lecturers, representatives of social or health services in our community, giving workshops and seminars to students about health, wellbeing, development, care and support for others.

When specific concerns are raised about the mental health of students which overcomes the responsibilities and expertise of the teachers and psychologists, caregivers are instructed to contact mental health services specialized in providing care to children and adolescents. In Belgrade, those services are located at the Institute for Mental Health and Clinic of Neurology and Psychiatry for Children and Youth.

## **LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES**

Well-being policy includes aspects of physical, social and academic environment covered in all policies implemented in our school. For additional steps made with students facing academic difficulties, consult SEN policy.

## **POLICY REVIEW PROCESS**

Policy created: August, 2023

First revision: September, 2023

Second revision: March, 2024

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## APPENDIX

### Potential warning signs – mental health

- Sudden mood changes
- Hesitant to speak or to participate in class activities
- Atypical emotional reactions for that student
- Sudden drops in academic performance
- Sudden changes in appearance
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Frequent complaints in regards to physical health (chest or stomach pain, headache, shortness of breath, excessive sweating...)
- Constant fatigue
- Frequent injuries, traces of self-harm

### Potential warning signs – neuropsychological difficulties

- Difficulty reading or spelling
- Difficult time focusing on classwork
- Frequent late submissions
- Intense focus on specific topics
- Incomprehensible handwriting