

2024 H. William Christ Educator Prize Recipient Carolyn Mak



Dr. Carolyn Mak is the Director, Well-Being and School Counseling at Branksome Hall, an IB World School for girls located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. As one of the school's first school social workers, Carolyn has been at Branksome for nine years and in the last two years, has been leading the school's team of school counselors and social workers. Previous to the director role, she counseled and supported students in the Junior School as their school social worker, a role in which she relished being available to individual students and families. As part of the evolution and growth in that role, she began to go into the classrooms to teach shoulder to shoulder with her educator colleagues. Using a customized curriculum for each classroom, students learned social-emotional learning (SEL) skills such as empathy, perspective-taking, how to communicate

so that their messages were received and heard as they were intended, and the ways to repair when there was negative conflict or social impact. Today, she and the current Junior School Social Worker divide up responsibilities to go into each Junior School class to provide SEL learning, having a developed scope and sequence that was built with child development in mind.

In the 2019-2020 school year, Carolyn was selected to be one of the pilot fellows in ICGS' Global Action Research Collaborative. She presented virtually at the 2021 ICGS conference about her research working with Grade 4 students and teaching them about ways to give feedback to each other and to adults during their recess experiences. As an extension of that work, in 2023, Carolyn and her colleague Dr. Natasha Koustova co-authored a well-received peer-reviewed academic paper entitled, "Recess Time: Help or Hindrance to the Social-Emotional Development of Young Children?" in the journal, *Theory Into Practice*. After successfully completing the GARC pilot program, Carolyn has continued her involvement with the GARC program as a Research Advisor, and has had the opportunity to work alongside an international contingent of girls educators, learning from them along the way.

In her current role, Carolyn continues to work with the youngest learners in the Junior School, and has recently begun to include more integrated social emotional learning with a broader reach into

issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Carolyn was one of the first employees to work collaboratively with colleagues to initiate a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) affinity group for employees at the school, and continues to have a deep interest in how to integrate DEI into everyday teaching and learning practices.

Carolyn has also been integral in helping the school develop policies that support student well-being. She was part of a team in the Junior School that looked at how adults were responding to student behavior; she helped consult and facilitate a process whereby the school was able to develop policies around “response to behavior” that is based in best practices and SEL learning. This work also yielded a co-authored publication in the journal *Children & Schools*. Carolyn has presented several times with the Junior School team to parent audiences to ensure alignment with this approach.

Now having a school-wide portfolio, Carolyn is currently working on how SEL skills are taught explicitly at the school, but also, how they are implicitly taught and learned through meaningful teacher-student, peer-to-peer and parent engagements. Part of this work has involved thinking about how student support is delivered at Branksome, and some of this was explored in Carolyn’s co-led ICGS presentation at the Global Forum in Cleveland in 2023 with Dr. Koustova called, “Social Emotional Learning Integration into Student Support and the Classroom.”

Carolyn has been a practicing social worker for over 20 years, with over half of her career in schools. She received her Bachelor of Science (Honors) degree from Queen’s University, a Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto, and earned her doctorate (PhD) in social work from Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts. This June in Baltimore at the ICGS Conference, she will be supporting and cheering on the five fellows in her advising group who are completing the 2024 GARC program.