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MEDIA RELEASE

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B.C. educators head back to school with a better understanding of child and youth mental health ***Summer Institute 2011: Promoting Mental Health in BC Schools***

Vancouver – Teachers are doing the learning this week at the *2011 Summer Institute: Promoting Mental Health in BC Schools*. On August 25, over 200 B.C. teachers, school counsellors, and district staff came together at Riverview Hospital in Coquitlam to learn how to better promote mental health in their classrooms and schools. The Institute gave educators information and tools they need to create healthier school environments and to address the challenges that many of their students will face this year.

“We know that most mental health and substance use challenges begin during the school-age years,” said Dr. Connie Coniglio, Director of Health Literacy for BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. “Schools are in a unique position to enhance the protective factors that help promote mental wellness among youth.”

Journalist Kathryn Gretsinger facilitated the Institute. The morning featured presentations from provincial school health experts; a panel discussion between a parent, youth, school counsellor and mental health professional; and examples of initiatives happening in schools across the province. In the afternoon, teachers engaged in discussion about issues related to anxiety, substance use, body image, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/questioning (LGBTQ) youth, and effective communication with parents.

The Institute raises awareness of the critical role that educators and school communities play in influencing mental health. Recent evidence has shown that the school environment can foster greater psychological wellness and reduced risk for adverse health outcomes among youth. For example, students who feel more connected to school are less likely to smoke, drink alcohol, experience emotional distress, have symptoms of anxiety or depression, or consider suicide. They are more likely to report that they are in good health and have higher self-esteem.

The next frontier is working to translate this knowledge into meaningful practice in school communities. Jeff Stewart, Principal of North Island District Education School and the closing speaker at the Institute said, “The narrow perspective that schools are simply about delivering curriculum and raising achievement data is giving way to a far more sophisticated and informed platform for education that is truly holistic in its view of the child, the place of the educator, and the role of the school community as protective factors in the lives of our children. British Columbia is one of only a few constituencies in this country that has a well-established network of health, education, and social services agencies that are working diligently to promote this agenda. The Summer Institute is at the forefront of this collaborative venture.”

Representatives from the following organizations were in attendance at the

Summer Institute and will offer additional information to educators:

- AnxietyBC
- BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information
- Canadian Mental Health Association - BC Division
- Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of BC / Youth in BC
- The Directorate of Agencies for School Health in British Columbia
- Family Services of the North Shore
- Jessie's Legacy Eating Disorders Prevention Program
- F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids' Mental Health
- FRIENDS for Life
- Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre
- McCreary Centre Society
- Ministry of Children and Family Development Child and Youth Mental Health
- Mood Disorders Association of BC
- QMUNITY
- School Age Children and Youth - Substance Use Prevention Initiative

The Summer Institute is a result of an ongoing collaboration between BC Children's Hospital and BC Mental Health and Addiction Services (both agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority), BC Teachers' Federation, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, School District 71, and other stakeholders. The Ministry of Children and Family Development and the BC Teachers' Federation have contributed financial support for this Institute and the BC Teachers' Federation will add mental health resources to its 'Teaching to Diversity' webpage in the coming months.