



# Equity in Education

## Final Evaluation Report

January 31, 2021

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

The focus of Equity in Education (EiE) was to improve educational outcomes for youth with vulnerabilities living in low-income neighborhoods in Ottawa by providing coordinated, wrap around supports directly to students and their families in three pilot communities; and working at a systems-level by providing stakeholders in multiple sectors with mechanisms for shared learning, promotion, and collaboration. In order to achieve these objectives, three Student Parent Support Workers (SPSWs) were hired to work with youth in three communities in Ottawa:

1. **Carlington Community Health Centre (SWAG):** The SPSW provided support to youth/families during grades 11 and 12, building on earlier supports they received in grades 9 and 10.
2. **Banff Avenue and Confederation Court Community Houses (CH):** The SPSW provided support to youth/families during the transition from grade 8 to high school, through two local Community Houses (neighbourhood hubs of support).
3. **St. Paul High School (SPHS):** The SPSW provided support to youth at a participating local secondary school located in a high-needs neighbourhood.

### Evaluation

To address the EiE objectives, we developed the following evaluation:

1. How does this pillar of support (provided by the SPSW) differ when it is part of a comprehensive/wrap around program versus when it is community-based?
2. To what extent did youth and families engage with the EiE SPSWs and how did this differ across the pilots, time, and different sub-groups of youth?
3. What was the experience of youth and their families participating in EiE – both as a group and within each pilot?
4. How has EiE been able to respond, adapt, and accommodate external shocks?

Our evaluation followed a mixed-methods design across three phases, from January 2018 to December 2020. Methods included a *document review*; *interviews* and *focus groups* with key staff and stakeholders, EiE students and their parents; and SPSWs and program delivery

partners; an annual *baseline* and *follow-up survey* with participating students; an *SPSW record* of outgoing referrals, highlights and challenges; and facilitation of two *stakeholder convening events* and a *stakeholder survey*.

## Findings

Overall, quantitative results showed negative trends in many areas. However, without a comparison group, interpreting changes within EiE participants cannot be tied directly to program participation, and may instead reflect external factors such as the school, home and community experiences of participants, as well as shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To better understand survey findings, qualitative methods and data were used to understand student experiences, both within EiE and in their broader life, and how participants, SPSWs, parents and partners indicate ‘what would have been’ in the absence of having access to an SPSW.

### *Student experiences at school*

From students’ perspectives, EiE programming provided a safe space to access academic, social, peer, and emotional supports. Many students felt academic supports such as tutoring were directly helpful for school, however most cited the holistic nature of supports as motivating them to stay engaged with school, and achieve academically. Former EiE students shared that if they did not have access to EiE, they would have become disengaged in school, dropped out, and/or failed academically.

However, survey results showed that students felt a decreased sense of school membership. Students in the 2018-2019 school year (SY1) and 2019-2020 school year (SY2) both increased their likelihood to report completing homework assignments, as well as ‘just wanting to get by’ – this change was statistically significant in SY2 (not in SY1). In SY1 students were statistically significantly less likely to report being given interesting homework at the end compared to the beginning of the academic year.

These survey results are contextualized through SPSW reports of inequitable access to opportunities at school for students from low-income households. SPSWs particularly noted supporting participants facing financial barriers to their ability to participate in activities in school (e.g., sports, field trips, enrichment opportunities), and supporting students through experiences of racism and discrimination experienced at school – either via policies or individual teacher/staff actions.

### *Student educational aspirations*

In speaking with students, they noted that help they received from SPSWs with planning for post-secondary, both in terms of credit accumulation and the path forward during high school, and in the process of selecting and applying to specific programs, was critical to seeing PSE as a possible path, choosing to apply, and applying.

In SY1, by the end of the academic year, 65% of EiE student respondents had applied to post-secondary programs, whereas in SY2, 31% reported applying. In SY1 a statistically significantly higher number of respondents noted wanting to obtain a post-secondary qualification at the end of the academic year (than at the beginning). In SY1 a statistically significantly higher proportion of students also reported increased interest and positive endorsement by their parents/guardians in participants attending post-secondary education, with no change in SY2 pre/post overall.

### *Student wellbeing*

Many students stated SPSWs offered social/emotional supports not offered by teachers or school staff. To the students interviewed, a balance of fun and social interactions with educational supports was crucial to building and maintaining their relationships with the SPSWs, and their interest in the program.

In SY2 there was a statistically significant reduction in the overall Child and Youth Resilience Measure scale score (with no change in SY1), as well as in the proportion of students who reported a high sense of belonging in their community. A higher proportion of students reported difficulty at home across years, particularly a higher proportion of students reporting increased conflict at home in Summer 2020 compared to Fall 2019.

Contrary to the quantitative results indicating that student resilience decreased in SY2, both students and SPSWs shared stories of continued resilience throughout SY2. Students affected by housing loss, food insecurity, and experiences of discrimination in communities and schools, were able to continue to attend school, engage academically and socially, and cope with multiple life stressors.

### *Social capital and coping*

In SY1 there were statistically significant increases in the number of students reporting volunteering at least once monthly (up 19% from Fall 2018 to Summer 2019), and in students reporting they can easily get help finding work if needed. There was no statistically significant change reported pre/post for students in SY2.

Qualitatively, students shared they felt their SPSW was ‘real’ and ‘got’ the things they were going through. It was helpful to have SPSWs with diverse cultural/racial backgrounds, and lived experiences that mirrored their own – students noted that the lack of ethnically diverse teachers and teachers who identify as part of their communities was a challenge for them. Students shared that although they did not feel as though their experiences were reflected in school staff, they were reflected by SPSWs. SPSWs and students reported that a large part of their role was to spend time with students building relationships and trust, offering emotional support, and providing support with developmental tasks such as drafting a resume, and applying to jobs. In addition to directly providing services, SPSWs acted as a link for students to other programs, services, and opportunities. Students reported having a close bond with SPSWs, and as such found it difficult when SPSWs were away from work intermittently, or when they left their positions.

### *Implementation findings*

Having multiple sites allowed for variation in contexts to explore implementation strengths and challenges. A spectrum emerged in the data depending on the level of structure within existing site programming and the clarity of SPSW role scope. St. Paul, the only in-school site, provided the most structure within which an SPSW operated, followed by SWAG, and then the Community Houses. Each sites’ programming was responsive to the communities served. At the CH sites, where staff tend to provide holistic, person-centered supports within a community setting, the boundary between SPSW-specific supports and CH supports was blurred. In addition, the large age range of students served at the CHs, and that there were two physical sites served by the CH SPSW across a vast geographic distance, created challenges for that SPSW. At the SWAG site, where the SPSW was introduced to extend supports historically provided to Grade 9 and 10 students to Grade 11 and 12 students, the intent was for participants to see the EiE SPSW role as an extension of the SWAG programming, with the only difference being student age/grade. While this was successful in regard to student perspectives of programming, there were challenges relating to clearly delineating job tasks and reporting structure at an administrative level.

In general, housing an SPSW within a site where students and families often attend other programming was viewed as a strength – and was part of the initial decision-making process driving site selection. For an SPSW or SPSW-like position to be sustainable within community sites (as opposed to operating from a centralized location), clarifying the scope of the role, reporting relationships, and relationship between the SPSW role and site activities is vital.

## Discussion

Our findings related to student experiences at school and resilience, particularly in SY2, must be interpreted in the context of global events and movements including the pandemic, Black Lives Matter, and the effects thereof on students served by EiE.

The shock of the COVID-19 pandemic to the academic year (SY2) cannot be understated – for all students, but particularly for students in their final year of high school. The effects of COVID-19 on many EiE students’ and families’ abilities to cope broadly – having access to food, stable housing, and income security – as well as students’ ability to continue to engage with academics were compounded by existing stressors and challenges associated with living in poverty.

In addition, the results related to students’ overall sense of belonging in their communities and at school, need to be placed in context of the ongoing violence, police brutality both in the United States (e.g., the murder of George Floyd), and locally (i.e. the trial of Const. Daniel Montsion in relation to the death of Somali-Canadian Abdirahman Abdi in Ottawa), and student reports of feeling unsafe in their communities from Spring into Summer 2020. Two-thirds of the EiE participants surveyed identified as Black, and many reported both individual-level and policy-level instances of identity erasure and racism at school. EiE did take action to support students dealing with racism in schools and in the community, through both support during individual incidents, and through providing youth with opportunities to collaboratively discuss and organize among themselves, but these results are nonetheless perhaps unsurprising.

## Conclusion & Recommendations

### *...For programs*

- It is critical to understand the existing structure, need for services, and programming at host sites, and how an SPSW would fit within these.
- Building relationships and partnerships with local schools is an integral component that allows SPSWs to advocate effectively for students, in terms of academic achievement, and also to help address issues of economic inequity and support students’ well-being.
- Having SPSWs whose lived experiences and backgrounds reflect the communities they serve is important to building relationships with students, as well as promoting and including the identities of racialized students within programs and services, and at school.
- The demand for SPSW services far exceeds the supply of SPSWs, youth outreach workers, and holistic supports for youth within low-income neighbourhoods.



- Addressing root causes of inequity means helping students and families ensure their basic needs – food, shelter, safety – are being met.
- Program content must be tailored to age and stage of education, primary learning language (English, French), and be able to support students in more advanced subjects, particularly for older students.
- Dedicated funding, resources, and supports are needed to retain staff and ensure that they have the time needed to both engage effectively with youth and families, as well as time to build and maintain relationships with schools and community resources.

#### *...For systems*

- Schools explore strategies to include, promote, and integrate diverse identities within their policies, curricula, and practices, and increase the diversity of school staff to better represent the communities in which they operate.
- Continue activities spearheaded by school and school board leaders across Ottawa to address anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism in schools; and provide on-going training to school personnel related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) best practices.

#### *...For networks and partnerships*

- Coordinating a collective impact initiative requires unique expertise and dedicated commitment and, as a result, would be most effective run by a dedicated body with a relevant core mandate as a backbone organization.
- There is a need to map existing collective impact initiatives and networks in place across the city, to encourage coordination and reduce duplication, particularly across different domains (e.g., education, housing, mental health) for more holistic youth supports.
- Continue to build on the momentum of having liaisons between community organizations, communities, and schools.
- Identify gaps and plans to address those gaps that are feasible and actionable by the networks and partner members.

#### *...For evaluation*

- Quantitative measures may not reflect individual change as much as reaction to or perception of systems issues. Look to qualitative methods and data to understand

student experiences and interpret survey findings, and how students and parents indicate ‘what would have been’ in the absence of having access to an SPSW.

- Evaluations such as this, which involve networks of community partnerships, need to consider the practicality of evaluation tools and how they can be embedded within existing processes and systems across organizations.
- Methods for sharing equity stories with schools and communities to better inform their practices need to be developed that maintain participant and program safety, while still allowing those stories to drive change towards a more equitable education system.

## BACKGROUND

### Issue being addressed

Youth living in low-income neighborhoods, both generally and in Ottawa specifically, experience significantly diminished educational outcomes (e.g., lower rates of high school graduation, lower rates of post-secondary attendance and graduation), compared to those living in more affluent areas (Fortin, 2016; Gilmore, 2010; Lyche, 2010). High school graduation rates can be as low as 50 per cent or less in some low-income communities (Pathways to Education, 2017). Inequities in educational outcomes are exacerbated by factors such as gaps in service delivery, systemic barriers to access, lack of communication between stakeholders, duplication of resources, and a lack of coordination in community services. Considerable research has shown that youth who do not graduate from high school are more likely to be living in poverty (Uppal, 2017) and are more likely to have contact with the health, social and legal systems (Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2016).

### Collective Impact: A framework for cross-sectoral action

Collective Impact (CI) is a *framework* for community-wide, collective action to tackle intractable social issues (so-called “wicked” problems) that has received considerable attention since first being introduced in 2011 (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012). The CI framework is gaining traction as a promising new approach to addressing inequities in educational attainment ‘from cradle to career’, particularly in the United States (Grossman & Lombard, 2015; Henig, Riehl, Rebell, & Wolff, 2015; Pace & Edmondson, 2014).

CI promotes collaboration across sectors by replacing “competing agendas, siloed funding streams, and duplicative programs with a shared vision for education reform” (Pace & Edmondson, 2014). The CI framework identifies five conditions for success: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. These can be useful markers for effective processes in collective action.

### Rationale for collective impact in improving equity in education

A recent national scan of cross-sector collaborations to improve educational attainment and outcomes in the United States identified 182 such collaborations, the largest of which is the StriveTogether Network (Henig, Riehl, Houston, Rebell, & Wolff, 2016). Stakeholders from higher education organizations were the most widely represented group within CI networks, second only to school district representatives (87 per cent versus 91 per cent). The growing

number of education-oriented CI initiatives generally include representatives from a diverse array of sectors outside education, including business, justice, and health (Gaines & Mohammed, 2013; Grossman & Lombard, 2015; Henig et al., 2015). CI provides a framework for structuring and delineating the way in which various important supports for young people can create synergy together to improve long-term impacts such as higher educational attainment, as well as create enabling environments and favourable conditions at specific points along the continuum from “cradle to career”, given that the pathway to post-secondary educational engagement and attainment begins in early childhood.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

### Host organization

The Pincrest Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC) has been delivering the Pathways to Education program to high school students living in low-income neighbourhoods in Ottawa’s west end since 2007. To date, over 1600 students have been served and the five-year graduation rate for the target neighbourhoods has risen from 52 per cent (in 2006, pre-Pathways) to an average of 82 per cent since the program’s launch.

Working in collaboration with all four Ottawa school boards and their respective schools, the Pathways to Education program provides a comprehensive set of academic, financial, and social supports to youth registered in the program. Students are provided with after-school tutoring, mentoring, and financial assistance to address barriers that can stand in the way of educational success. In addition, each student is assigned a Student-Parent Support Worker (SPSW) who acts as a liaison between students, parents/families, and school staff. SPSWs build trusting relationships with youth and coordinate supports that build on the strengths and address the individual needs of each student in order to keep them on track towards educational success.

### Need

With the goal of reaching students who would benefit from Pathways programming, but who fall outside of the catchment area for the Pathways program, PQCHC has been working with stakeholders over the past several years to establish a CI initiative called Equity in Education (EiE) to explore ways to collectively address the gap in academic achievement rates amongst low-income communities in Ottawa. Pincrest Queensway Community Health Center, Pathways to Education Canada, and additional community stakeholders from across the city are contributing to EiE. The long-term vision of EiE is to engage stakeholders from all sectors to

come together to provide tangible interventions that draw on the learnings of Pathways to Education and other successful evidence-based models to inform policy and systems changes.

### Equity in Education pilot sites: The role of the SPSW

The ‘full-service’ Pathways to Education model is not available to all Ottawa communities; however, key elements of the Pathways model – including academic, extracurricular and leadership supports – already exist in some low-income communities in Ottawa. In order to build on existing community services and strengths, the first year of the EiE initiative consisted primarily of convening stakeholders to determine the root causes of the educational inequities found in specific neighbourhoods and to identify potential areas of collaboration that would produce mutually-reinforcing activities. Stakeholders identified one critical component of the Pathways model in particular that was often missing from community services: access to a Student-Parent Support Worker (SPSW). Through this process, the need became apparent for an SPSW to coordinate wrap around/holistic services for youth and act as the liaison between youth, their families, schools and community organizations.

Core SPSW responsibilities include understanding the strengths and needs of students, the assets and resources that are available to them within their neighborhoods, and the gaps in service delivery they and their families experience that create barriers to success. From 2017-2018, EiE was able to fund a pilot project that explored the SPSW role within one low-income community in Ottawa. This pilot provided an opportunity to engage stakeholders in the CI process using a tangible intervention, while continuing to move towards systems and policy level changes necessary to enhance Ottawa-wide Equity in Education.

EiE received three years (January 2018-December 2020) of funding from the province of Ontario’s Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF), as well as funding from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)<sup>1</sup>, to continue the current pilot project and to scale it to two additional communities. The focus of EiE was to improve educational outcomes for youth with vulnerabilities living in low-income neighborhoods in Ottawa by:

5. Providing coordinated, wrap around supports directly to students and their families in three pilot communities; and
6. Working at a systems-level by providing stakeholders in multiple sectors with mechanisms for shared learning, promoting the use of best practices (e.g., creating shared measurement systems and building evaluation capacity), facilitating engagement

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<sup>1</sup> HEQCO funded the evaluation of the CI, and LPRF funded the EiE program evaluation. HEQCO funding for the CI evaluation began in Spring 2018 and was ended in Winter 2019.

and collaboration, mobilizing resources to stakeholders to build their capacity in addressing this issue, and recommending policy and systems changes based on their findings.

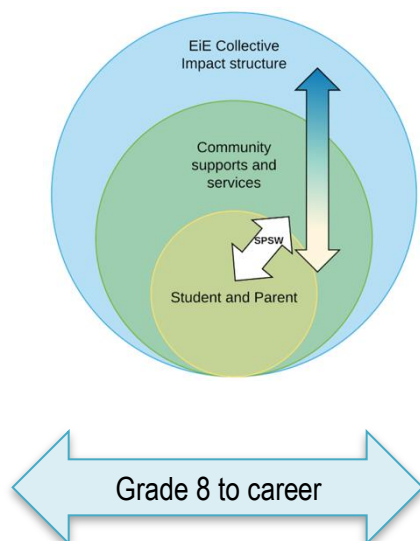
In order to achieve these objectives, three SPSWs were hired to work with youth at different ages and stages of intervention in three separate communities in Ottawa. Stakeholders engaged in EiE identified the communities as priority areas in which students could benefit from education-related supports. As a part of the pilot site selection process, stakeholders and PQCHC staff conducted an extensive review of Ottawa neighborhoods' data related to high school graduation rates, income levels, community services and supports in place, and feasibility for partnering with PQCHC. Although all sites are working towards a common set of outcomes, each site delivered programming tailored to their respective community and responding to needs identified through CI meetings and stakeholder engagement.

The following were the three pilot sites:

7. **Carlington Community Health Centre (SWAG):** The SPSW provided support to youth and their families during senior years of high school and during the transition to post-secondary education or meaningful employment (grades 11 and 12). The SPSW worked with the youth/family for up to 2 years. This approach supported students that had already received wrap around support in grades 9 and 10 through the Students Will All Graduate (SWAG) program. This intervention was hosted by a partnering Community Health Centre.
8. **Banff Avenue and Confederation Court Community Houses (CH):** The SPSW provided support to youth/families during the transition year of grade 8 to high school. The SPSW supported the youth/family for 1 year. This intervention was hosted by two local Community Houses (neighbourhood hubs of support) located in the two priority communities.
9. **St. Paul High School (SPHS):** The SPSW provided support to at-risk youth at a participating local secondary school located in a high-needs neighbourhood. The SPSW provided services and support to youth largely within the school environment. Initially, this pilot was hosted by A Way Home Ottawa/Raising the Roof Canada and involved The Upstream Project (TUP).

Figure 1 illustrates how the SPSW role in each of the pilot communities functions within local and broader CI structures.

**Figure 1 Multi-level influence of CI across the educational continuum**



## EVALUATION OF EQUITY IN EDUCATION

The program logic model and theory of change are presented in Appendix A however below, we present an overview of how we anticipated change happens for individuals and communities.

### How change happens

As a CI initiative, EiE works across multiple sectors as well as multiple *levels* of activity. The EiE pilot sites and associated SPSWs deliver services that are responsive to context locally, as well as work together to communicate strengths, needs, and findings to stakeholders at the community/city-wide level.

We anticipated that students and parents would experience targeted outcomes such as being able to access services through the SPSW and gaining increased awareness of services available in the community. We also anticipated that the CI structure in each community would improve the

processes and mechanisms – both individually and relationally – that facilitate improved student experiences and provision of wrap around supports.

Figure 2 provides an overview of how the CI structure is thought to influence interactions between the broader stakeholder group, neighborhood clusters, SPSWs, students and their parents. Community organizations in this figure include cross-sectoral organizations such as schools, government institutions (i.e., healthcare, immigration support), funders, post-secondary institutions, mentors, and community members.

The overall CI structure provides support to neighborhood clusters through ongoing learning and feedback between communities and the broader stakeholder group. Students and parents form the nucleus of the pilot interventions – their experiences may be influenced by improved collaboration within neighborhood clusters facilitated by both the CI structure and by the SPSW role.

**Figure 2** Micro and meso-level outcomes of the CI structure



Desired outcomes for students and parents are:

- Improved experience/perceived coordination of support services within communities
- Increased awareness of available supports for students and families
- Increased rates of student school attendance



- Student engagement with SPSW
- Increased student sense of school belonging
- Increased student and parent sense of community belonging
- Improved student mental health
- Increased rates of student expectation of and aspiration for post-secondary education

## EVALUATION DESIGN AND APPROACH

Measuring outcomes for students is important for understanding whether and how the EiE intervention is successful at the individual level. However, much of the success of any intervention involves complex interactions within the contexts, systems, and environments in which it is delivered. In a CI evaluation of EiE, funded briefly by HEQCO, we had planned a fulsome exploration of the contextual, systems-level processes and outcomes experienced by EiE stakeholders. Due to a discontinuation of funds, we were unable to move forward as planned. However, wherever possible, we integrated information from community stakeholders to capture system or community-level awareness and engagement.

### Evaluation objectives and guiding questions

The action areas identified by EiE stakeholders are to influence students' school experiences, build wrap around supports for student participants, and facilitate neighborhood engagement within pilot communities. Our evaluation objectives were:

- To better understand the impact of the coordination of wrap around holistic services amongst existing community organizations/stakeholders for youth and their families;
- To explore how systemic barriers manifest for students and families within the education system and how protective factors and resilience are cultivated at individual, school, and community levels; and ultimately,
- To learn how contextual factors across pilot sites influence the implementation of EiE and the outcomes experienced by students and families.

Ultimately, the objective of the evaluation was to support EiE in reaching its goal of eliminating the inequities in educational achievement rates found in low income communities in Ottawa. To address these objectives, we developed the following evaluation questions, together with EiE staff, to guide our work:

1. How does this pillar of support (provided by the SPSW) differ when it is part of a comprehensive/wrap around program versus when it is community-based?
  - a. What are the universal features and which features are unique to each pilot site?
2. To what extent did youth and families engage with the EiE SPSWs and how did this differ across the pilots, time, and different sub-groups of youth?
  - a. What lessons have been learned about how to engage youth in marginalized communities?
3. What was the experience of youth and their families participating in EiE – both as a group and within each pilot – in terms of:
  - a. their awareness of, and connection to community supports;
  - b. students’ attendance, sense of belonging, interaction (behaviour), and achievement at school;
  - c. school systems’ responses to students with social, emotional, academic, and behavioural challenges.

We added an additional evaluation question:

4. How has EiE been able to respond, adapt, and accommodate external shocks (COVID, BLM)?

## Approach and design

Throughout the EiE pilot, we took a developmental evaluation approach, which allowed for responsive and collaborative evaluation processes and ongoing learning. Developmental evaluation is an established evaluation method that fits a niche need (Patton, 2010). While traditional evaluation approaches work well for more fixed, stable programs, developmental evaluation is suited to programs operating under dynamic conditions in complex environments. Our evaluation followed a mixed-methods design across three phases, summarized below:

- **Phase 1** (January to August 2018): Design phase – in this phase, we oriented ourselves to the pilot sites by conducting a *document review* and *interviews* with key staff and stakeholders. We co-developed and tested a quantitative survey exploring key outcomes of interest for EiE students, along with processes for embedding evaluation data collection within program processes.

- **Phase 2** (September 2018 to August 2019): School year 1 – in School year 1 (SY1), we piloted the *baseline student survey* in the pilot sites that were operational in Fall 2018, as well as the follow-up survey at the end of SY1 across all three pilot sites. We conducted *focus groups* with EiE students, as well as with parents of EiE students. We facilitated a *stakeholder convening event* in early 2019, and following this, we conducted a *stakeholder survey* in early 2019, and shared results back with stakeholder participants at a second *convening event* in Summer 2019. We conducted *interviews* with EiE staff and program delivery partners at each pilot site.
- **Phase 3** (September 2019 to December 2020): School year 2 – in School year 2 (SY2), we revised the *student survey*, and collected the baseline and follow up surveys with EiE students in Fall 2019, and Summer 2020 across pilot sites. Based on feedback from EiE staff, we co-developed a tool for SPSWs to record outgoing referrals, highlights, challenges, and stories related to equity on a monthly basis. We conducted *interviews* and *focus groups* with students in Spring and Summer 2020, as well as *interviews* with EiE staff and program delivery partners at each pilot site.

## Ethics

The evaluation team obtained approval from the Community Research Ethics Organization (CREO) research ethics board in Summer 2018.

## EVALUATION ACTIVITIES (SY1)

### Design phase: Data sources

#### *Document review*

SRDC reviewed program documents, including a prior pilot evaluation report, community data inputs that had informed pilot site selection, and program delivery materials. As the profiles of the students served varied across sites, so too did the programs' registration forms (if existent). SRDC and EiE staff mapped student characteristics, registration forms, eligibility criteria, and other factors across sites, and created a uniform EiE registration form.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that initially one of the three sites' program referral/eligibility criteria was planned to be derived from a standardized assessment conducted by The Upstream Project (TUP), with the entire student population (at St. Paul High School). The TUP assessment focused primarily on student

Evaluation of academic year 2018/19 was conducted as a ‘test year’ for data collection. We trialed the survey tools and data collection approaches for the student pre- and post-survey. In the *Evaluation adaptations* section below, we outline changes made based on feedback provided by students, SPSWs and delivery partners.

### *Student pre- and post-survey*

In the design phase, we co-designed the student pre- and post-survey with EiE and Pathways to Education Ottawa staff – both in terms of content and processes for streamlining and embedding data collection processes within existing program activities. Information collected in the student pre- and post-survey complemented data from student registration forms – we outline consent processes for evaluation participation below in the *Survey rollout* section.

In co-designing the student pre- and post- survey, our objective was to create a tool that could be used for evaluation but was also useful for SPSWs, allowing them to identify, in near real-time, what strengths and challenges existed for students on their respective caseloads. The SRDC team conducted three engagement events with EiE and Pathways to Education Ottawa staff in this phase to identify and prioritize key outcomes of interest for staff, as well as to determine the feasibility of the survey roll out logistically across pilot sites. The student pre- and post-survey focused on the following domains:

- *Student demographics* associated with educational and intermediate outcomes along students’ access to educational supports and outcomes, including age, gender identity, and ethnicity.
- *Student experiences at school* including the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM), own and peer attitudes towards school activities and assignments, school absences, and disciplinary actions.
- *Student educational aspirations* including plans to pursue post-secondary education, and desire to complete post-secondary education.

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homelessness, psychological distress, and risk factors for disengagement with school. Although St. Paul remained a pilot site, this assessment was not used as the primary referral criterion as TUP did not obtain ethics approval for their project. The partnership was dissolved with TUP and A Way Home Ottawa and the referral process shifted to being needs-based. In practice, St. Paul staff would refer students in need of support to the SPSW, who operated onsite at the school, and if students were not eligible for Pathways to Education programming, they would be connected with the EiE SPSW.

- *Student home life* including own resilience (the Child and Youth Resilience Measure – 12 item), sense of community belonging, home environment, parent expectations regarding post-secondary education, and housing precariousness.
- *Student social capital and coping.*

For the final student pre- and post-survey tools, see Appendix B. For more information on each of the scales included in the survey, and how they were scored, see Appendix C.

The student pre- and post-survey was conducted at two points in time in each school year: the baseline “pre” survey near the beginning of the academic year, or as soon as possible after a student joined the EiE program, and the follow-up “post” survey collected near the end of the school year. In the pre-survey, students were asked to identify coping mechanisms they use during stressful situations, current study/work goals, and things they liked best about themselves.<sup>3</sup> Measures included in the survey have been validated for youth (age 12+) and align with the indicators and intended outcomes outlined in the logic model.

## **Survey testing**

Prior to distributing the student pre- and post-survey, SRDC tested the tools with a group of youth aged 14-18 (n=7) to gain feedback about the content and sequencing of the questions and to ensure relevance to youths’ experiences. Feedback was also obtained by program staff and was reflected in the final version of the survey. Surveys were available in both English and French for language accessibility.

Surveys were programmed on a secure online survey platform (VoxCo), with data stored on its secure Canadian server. Informed consent and assent were obtained from both youth and their parents prior to participating in surveys. Surveys employed a unique identifier code, rather than youth names, in order to anonymize data.

## **Planned survey rollout**

At the outset of SY1, there were delays in EiE implementation due to staff turnover and shifts in partnerships surrounding TUP’s site (St. Paul High School). As of September 2018, all three

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<sup>3</sup> In the initial survey, the Kessler-10 distress scale – a measure of non-specific psychological distress –was included. This item was removed for the follow-up survey conducted at the end of the 2018/19 academic year and was replaced by the five-item self-rated mental health measure. See pre and post student surveys in Appendix B, and more information about how questions were selected in Appendix C.

SPSWs were hired and SPSWs in two of the pilots (SWAG and the community houses) had formally registered youth in programming. Pre-surveys were planned for piloting across all three sites, however, due to delays in finalizing the partnership between TUP and St. Paul High School, registration of EiE students at the St. Paul site was initiated in January 2019. Thus, no pre-surveys were collected with St. Paul students in SY1.

Program staff noted that gathering informed consent for evaluation participation would be most feasible during the program registration process. In addition to the student pre- and post-survey, information about students' households was collected through the EiE registration process, including household income, immigration status, ethnicity, and chronic health conditions. At registration, SPSWs gathered informed consent for the evaluation from parents and students by explaining the purpose of the evaluation, SRDC's role, and the distinction between consent to participate in EiE itself vs. EiE's program evaluation, reinforcing that participation in the evaluation was voluntary and would not influence participation in the program itself. Parents and students could consent to one of three options related to sharing their information with the EiE evaluation and the SRDC team:

- Registration information *only*
- Registration information and student pre- and post-survey
- Registration information, student surveys, and student report cards (shared by students and/or parents)

In order for information to be included in the evaluation, both parents and students had to consent to the same level of information sharing (where there were discrepancies, we included the least amount of information consented to).

SPSWs at each of the EiE operational program sites informed the logistics of survey rollout. For example, at the Community Houses, surveys were completed on paper by individual students and then entered by the SPSW into the secure online survey platform (VoxCo). The SPSW was present with the students when they completed the survey to ensure they could answer any questions/clarify any language (particularly for younger students). This option was chosen to facilitate a safe environment for students to complete the survey, to allow students to ask questions, and to encourage students to complete the survey to the end.

### *Academic data*

In addition to information gathered from students and parents through the registration and student pre- and post-survey, we worked with EiE staff throughout the evaluation to assess feasibility of collecting academic data for EiE students. Initially, we were hoping to collect

information related to student school attendance, school disciplinary actions, and student scholastic achievement, including grades and credit accumulation. In the design phase, it became clear that obtaining academic records from schools would not be feasible as EiE students spanned multiple schools and school boards. After consulting with EiE staff, the decision was taken to collect academic records directly from students and parents instead of via the school boards due to timeline constraints – both in terms of data collection and also processes related to obtaining ethics approval from multiple school boards. In SY1 we developed an academic record tracking sheet for EiE staff to populate. However, due to staff turnover at EiE and PQCHC more broadly, these data were not inputted and included in the evaluation. The academic data template can be found in Appendix D.

### *Student focus groups*

The purpose of the student focus groups was to understand and explore youth participants' experiences of EiE academic and social supports as well as their perspectives on the strengths, challenges, and gaps in the resources and services available to them within their communities. Focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide, which asked youth to reflect on:

- Awareness of community supports
- Awareness of EiE program supports
- Strengths of EiE programming
- Areas for improvement of EiE programming (see Appendix H for a summary of student focus group findings from school year 1).

SRDC and EiE project partners first developed a series of guiding questions for the student focus groups. Then, recognizing the importance of involving youth meaningfully in the evaluation process, we consulted with youth leaders who were identified by program staff from the EiE pilot sites. We engaged one youth leader from each of the EiE pilot sites involved, which included SWAG and both Banff Avenue and Confederation Court community houses. The three youth leaders provided feedback on the focus group guides as well as on the overall approach to facilitating focus groups in their program space.

In addition to youth engagers' feedback being incorporated into the final versions of the focus group protocols and data collection activities, youth leaders also helped to facilitate and recruit youth to participate in the focus groups. Each youth leader was compensated with a \$50 gift card for their time consulting and supporting focus group facilitation.

### *Parent focus groups*

In SY1 SRDC and EiE planned two focus groups (n=3; and n=4 respectively) with parents in May 2019 in order to collect information about parents' perspectives concerning:

- Child's academic experiences
- Awareness of community supports
- Awareness of EiE program supports
- Strengths of EiE programming
- Areas for improvement of EiE programming (see Appendix H for a summary of parent focus group findings from school year 1).

### *SPSW interviews*

Individual interviews were conducted with SPSWs (n=3) in Spring 2019, focusing on SPSW experiences with program implementation, student engagement, and student and parent outcomes (see Appendix I for a summary of SPSW interview findings from school year).

### *Delivery partner interviews*

Individual interviews were conducted with delivery partners, including Executive Directors of the Community House sites (n=2), and youth workers at the two Community House sites and SWAG (n=4). Interviews were conducted in Spring 2019 and focused on program implementation, the interaction between sites and SPSWs, student engagement, and student and parent outcomes.

### *CI Stakeholder dialogues*

In June 2018 and February 2019, SRDC facilitated stakeholder dialogues with members of the EiE stakeholder network engaged in the CI initiative. Attendees of this group represented over 30 organizations across Ottawa. The objectives for the first dialogue were to convene organizations together to mutually identify CI outcome indicators and to map assets to explore existing committees, groups, and city-wide tables with which EiE could strategize to enhance wrap around educational supports for students in low-income neighborhoods across Ottawa.

In the second stakeholder dialogue, themes from student, SPSW, and delivery partner focus groups and interviews were shared with stakeholders for validation and prioritization for action



at the systems/community levels. Themes included available community supports and gaps/needs identified by students and SPSWs, and overarching conditions for program sustainability. Stakeholders were asked to reflect on actionable areas and make suggestions about *how to take action*, either through issue-specific, or community-specific channels.

## **CI Stakeholder survey**

SRDC and EiE developed a short survey to send to members of the EiE stakeholder network engaged in the CI initiative – specifically, those members who have been engaged in the CI initiative since its inception – in order to elicit information about the usefulness of stakeholder gatherings, as well as the content areas and approaches that would help sustain or enhance stakeholders’ engagement in the EiE network. This survey was designed to ask for feedback from the attendees at the two stakeholder dialogues, as well as to engage those who were unable to attend the dialogues in person. The survey was focused on gathering stakeholder feedback to validate, prioritize, and identify recommended approaches to addressing action areas in the pilot site communities. The full CI stakeholder survey can be found in Appendix E.

A summary of findings from the CI stakeholder dialogues and the CI stakeholder survey can be found in Appendix F.

## **EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ADAPTATIONS (SY2)**

### **Data collection and analysis**

#### *Student pre- and post-survey*

In the summer of 2019, the mental health measures (Kessler-10 distress) were removed from the student pre- and post-survey based on concerns from SPWSs and school board staff that the Kessler-10 was overly invasive and not necessary for the purpose of evaluation. As a replacement measure, self-rated mental health (non-diagnostic) was added. Self-reported mental health is a common indicator used by the Mental Health Commission of Canada by many public health units. The exact question was obtained from the national Canadian Community Health Survey so that data may provide comparison to national survey data.

#### *Student pre- and post-survey data analysis*

Survey completion rates increased in SY2, however statistical inference is problematic across years. Initially, SRDC had planned to assess the feasibility of a counterfactual – namely, Pathways to Education Ottawa students. However, due to varying age and population

demographics, comparability across Pathways to Education Ottawa and the three EiE sites was determined to be problematic. Due to the low numbers of matched pre- and post-surveys at the individual level, SRDC compared proportions of pooled pre/post responses at a group level. Quantitative analysis included looking at average responses across participants to questions at pre and again at post, using two-tailed t-tests to explore whether the averages significantly changed. Results presented here are those in which significant change was achieved at the confidence level of 10% or below. Confidence levels are indicated in text as asterisks:

- 10% confidence level: \*
- 5% confidence level: \*\*
- 1% confidence level: \*\*\*

Open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively using iterative thematic coding to classify responses based on emerging topics, with an eye for identifying both trends and unique experiences.

### *Student focus groups*

In SY2, SRDC had planned to connect with current and former EiE participants in Spring 2020, prior to the end of the academic year in order to explore student experiences of EiE. In March 2020, the pandemic (COVID-19) precipitated a significant shock to schools, school systems, and the 2019-2020 academic year in Ontario and globally. SRDC proceeded with focus groups and individual interviews with current and former EiE students in July 2020.

This group of participants was recruited through convenience sampling, with SPSWs approaching youth they thought would be interested and available. Selection of format (i.e. group, one-on-one) was made through consultation with SPSWs to identify which format was most appropriate with their specific youth. Likewise, through consultation between SPSWs and SRDC, the group interview was co-facilitated by SRDC and that site's SPSW, while the one-on-one interviews at the other two sites were conducted with only SRDC researchers and youth.

This data collection element was added in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in an effort to better understand how youths' experience with the program changed in response to the pandemic. Data collection also explored how anti-Black racism both locally and internationally, protests, and the Black Lives Matter movement influenced student experiences. As a result of the pandemic, all interviews were conducted online or by telephone. Youth consent was collected verbally during the process, and youth were provided with virtual \$25 UberEats gift cards for their participation.

Responses were analyzed qualitatively using iterative thematic coding to classify responses based on emerging topics, with an eye for identifying both trends and unique experiences.

### *Youth case studies*

In Fall 2020, SRDC engaged in case study activities with three youth from two different pilot sites. The purpose of the case studies was to explore in greater depth how these three specific participants moved through the program and any impact they saw as a result of participation, particularly as it related to school engagement. This data collection was proposed in order to address the removal of academic data tracking from the evaluation.

Recognizing the limitations of student survey data across both SY1 and SY2, and its interpretation, SRDC worked with EiE staff to recruit students (n=3) to participate in in-depth interviews to illustrate their journeys throughout the EiE program. Students were asked to reflect on their entry into EiE programming, their experiences receiving support from their SPSW(s), and their exit from the program. They were also invited to share their academic progress throughout the time they were involved with EiE, along with any other outcomes they felt were relevant (e.g., employment, application to PSE, social connectedness).

Each youth participated in a call with SRDC evaluators that lasted for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. As with the youth interviews, youth were recruited through convenience sampling, with SPSWs approaching youth who had had a longer exposure to the program and whom they thought would be interested and available. Youth consent was collected verbally during the process, and youth were provided with virtual \$25 UberEats gift cards for their participation.

Responses were analyzed individually in order to create three distinct profiles that illustrate particular examples of how youth moved through the program. Case study profiles are presented in Appendix J.

### *Staff and partner interviews*

Interviews with program partners and SPSWs were conducted from May-June 2020, including:

- Four interviews with participating staff at the three pilot sites (including both community houses), regarding their experience with the Equity in Education pilots.
- Five interviews with current or former SPSWs covering their experience working with youth through the program.

The purpose of the interviews was to reflect back on the entirety of the pilots, and identify strengths, challenges, and recommendations for the program.

Responses were analyzed qualitatively using iterative thematic coding to classify responses based on emerging topics, with an eye for identifying both trends (within and across sites) and unique experiences.

### *Implementation and equity tracker*

Over the summer of 2019, EiE staff and the SRDC team worked together to co-develop a tool to track SPSWs' reflections about program delivery, as well as 'equity stories' across sites. The objective of this tool was to support real-time (monthly) tracking of referrals SPSWs were making for students, to other community supports, as well as program highlights and challenges. SPSWs inputted any observations related to students, their role, and the context/sites in which they delivered services. Equity stories were defined by SPSWs as examples of student, SPSW, and family experiences of equity (or inequity) with respect to academic, social, and community experiences. Each SPSW populated their reflections in an excel spreadsheet (the tool) throughout SY2.

Qualitative data were extracted from the three SPSWs' trackers, and first coded using the a priori structure: highlights, challenges, and equity stories, and then coded thematically across SPSWs and sites to explore SPSWs' perspectives on student outcomes, experiences, their role(s), and the interactions between their role, site, and school systems. Data pertaining to student referrals were automatically calculated by the tracking tool and extracted.

### *Process adaptations*

Over the summer of 2019, SRDC adapted data collection processes as well. After receiving feedback from SPSWs that consent forms were lengthy (in order to meet REB requirements), and although in plain language, were overwhelming for some parents – particularly parents whose primary language was neither French nor English. Consent forms were summarized into a one-page summary brief which SPSWs felt allowed them to better communicate the purpose and parameters of consent to parents.

### *Reasons for adaptation*

**Staff turnover:** Over the course of the evaluation, there were a number of staffing changes within the EiE team including a change in project manager, changes in SPSWs at pilot sites, and a change in administrative/data input support. The remaining two EiE staff were also away due to personal reasons in late summer/early fall. These disruptions in staffing resulted in some delays to the program's launch in September 2019 and partially delayed collecting registration data and students completing the pre-surveys. To accommodate these unforeseen delays, the data collection period was extended into November 2019.

**COVID-19 and academic data:** The inputting of academic data from SY1 and SY2 data was paused to prioritize the student registration and survey completion. As mentioned above, it was anticipated that academic data from 2018/19 and 2019/20 would be collected in Summer 2020, and provide information about total credits, math, English, and French grades, absences, literacy test scores, and graduation. Academic data for SY2 were not collected as they would not have been an accurate reflection of student achievements: students were guaranteed passing marks/course credits due to disruptions related to COVID-19. With the onset of the pandemic, SRDC shifted towards qualitative data collection of student experiences, self-reported absences, and academic progress during interviews and focus groups with students in Summer 2020.

In Table 1, we provide an overview of evaluation adaptations.

Table 1 **Evaluation adaptations**

Evaluation domain	Planned data collection method	Planned approach	Mitigating factors	Learning, adapting, responding
Students – individual outcomes	Survey	<i>Sample size</i> 150-170 overall	Overlap year to year Consent – parent engagement	Adjusted to 60%
		<i>Mode of data collection</i> Online	Comprehension Safety Burden on respondents	Adjusted to paper copies, entered online afterwards by SPSWs
		<i>Mode of use</i> Real-time/Dashboard	Lack of integration across multiple IT systems for EiE	Referral tracking sheet
	Academic data	Gather data from report cards	Multiple schools and school boards COVID-19 pandemic	Qualitative data from SPSWs related to academic streaming Case studies Parents
Systems outcomes	Interviews	<i>School personnel</i>	Relationship-building	Referral tracking/equity stories

Engagement and responsiveness	N/A	N/A	External shocks: COVID-19 pandemic BLM	Focus groups, in-depth interviews, change in content and approach
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Table 2 provides an overview of the *actual* evaluation activities conducted across phases, by data source and evaluation domains addressed.

Table 2 Evaluation activities

Data source	Methods of data collection	Data collection timing						Domains captured	Evaluation questions addressed	Adaptations
		SY1 Fall	SY1 Winter	SY1 Summer	SY2 Fall	SY2 Winter	SY2 Summer			
Youth	Survey	*		*	*		*	<i>Demographics</i> School environment Attitudes towards school School behaviours Peer and parent attitudes towards education Mental health Goal setting Coping Strengths	Student experiences Individual outcomes School system responses	Mental health measures removed in SY2 Dashboard discontinued in SY2 Consent process
	Focus groups	*					*	Awareness of community supports Awareness of EiE program supports Strengths of EiE programming Areas for improvement of EiE programming	Wrap around vs. community-based supports Student engagement across communities Student experiences Awareness of supports	Timeline (earlier)
	Interviews						*	Virtual student engagement	Contextual responsiveness	Content focus (COVID-19)

								Black Lives Matter		
	Ongoing engagement	*		*	*		*	Informing data collection content and processes		
SPSWs	Interviews	*					*	<p>Awareness of community supports</p> <p>Awareness of EiE program supports</p> <p>Strengths of EiE programming</p> <p>Areas for improvement of EiE programming</p> <p>Interaction between SPSW and partner sites/ delivery partners</p>	<p>Wrap around vs. community-based supports</p> <p>Student engagement across communities</p> <p>Student experiences</p> <p>Awareness of supports</p> <p>Access to supports</p> <p>Contextual responsiveness</p>	<p>Timeline</p> <p>Content (interaction with sites and partners)</p>
	Implementation and equity tracking				*	*	*	<p>Highlights – interactions with students and school systems</p> <p>Challenges – faced by students, in interacting with school systems</p> <p>Equity stories</p>	<p>Wrap around vs. community-based supports</p> <p>Student engagement across communities</p> <p>Student experiences</p> <p>Access to supports</p> <p>Contextual responsiveness</p>	Across sites in SY2
	Ongoing engagement	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Informing data collection content and processes	
Parents	Focus groups			*				<p>Student achievement</p> <p>Awareness of community supports</p>	Wrap around vs. community-based supports	Added



								Awareness of EIE program supports Strengths of EIE programming Areas for improvement of EIE programming	Parent and student engagement across communities Student experiences Awareness of supports Access to supports	
Delivery partners	Interviews	*					*	Strengths of EIE programming Areas for improvement of EIE programming	Wrap around vs. community-based supports	Cross-site
Community stakeholders	Facilitated meetings		*	*				Identifying areas for action Prioritizing areas for action	Collective impact Systems outcomes	N/A
	Survey		*					Validating areas for action Validating modes of operationalizing areas for action	Collective impact Systems outcome	N/A
PQCHC staff	Ongoing meetings	*	*	*	*	*	*			Manager turnover August 2019 – exit interview

## EVALUATION FINDINGS

### WHO PARTICIPATED IN EVALUATION?

In SY1, 61 EiE participants took part in either survey (n=32 – with 13 matched post responses), or qualitative (n=29) evaluation activities. Approximately just over half (52 per cent) of registered EiE participants in Fall 2018 consented to and completed the student survey. As noted above, lessons learned related to data collection tool content, and processes in SY1 were integrated into SY2’s evaluation activities.

Table 3 SY1 Evaluation participation

Youth			SPSWs	Delivery partners	Stakeholders	
Survey – pre	Survey – post	Focus groups and interviews	Interviews	Interviews	Convening events	Survey
32	13	29	3	6	20 (organizations)	20 (individuals)

In SY2, 80 EiE participants took part in either survey (n=63 pre and 39 post responses), or qualitative (n=17) evaluation activities. Just under seventy per cent (69 per cent) of students who registered for EiE in Fall 2019 took part in the student survey.

Table 4 SY2 Evaluation participation

Youth			SPSWs	Delivery partners	Stakeholders
Survey – pre	Survey – post	Focus groups and interviews	Interviews	Interviews	
63	39	17	5	4	0

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### Student demographics

#### *Student age*

Based on the first survey of the year, the average age of participants was slightly lower in SY2 than it was in SY1:

Table 5 Survey participant age

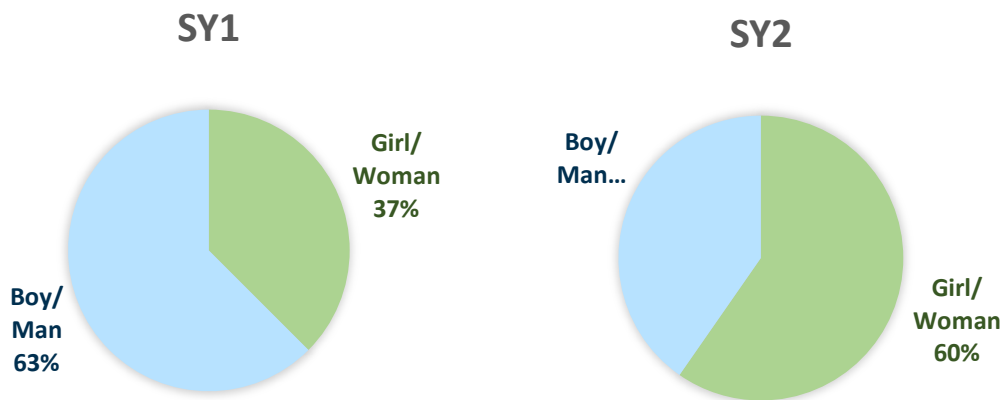
	SY1	SY2	SIGNIFICANCE
<b>AVERAGE AGE</b>	15.6	14.8	**

### Gender

Participants were asked their current gender identity and given options for: Girl/Woman; Boy/Man; Agender; Non-binary; Transgender; Prefer not to answer; You don't have an option that applies to me. I identify as;; and Unsure.

Due to small sample sizes, only the proportion of those who selected Girl/Woman or Boy/Man are presented here, based on responses to the first survey of both years. The proportions were significantly different between years (\*\*).

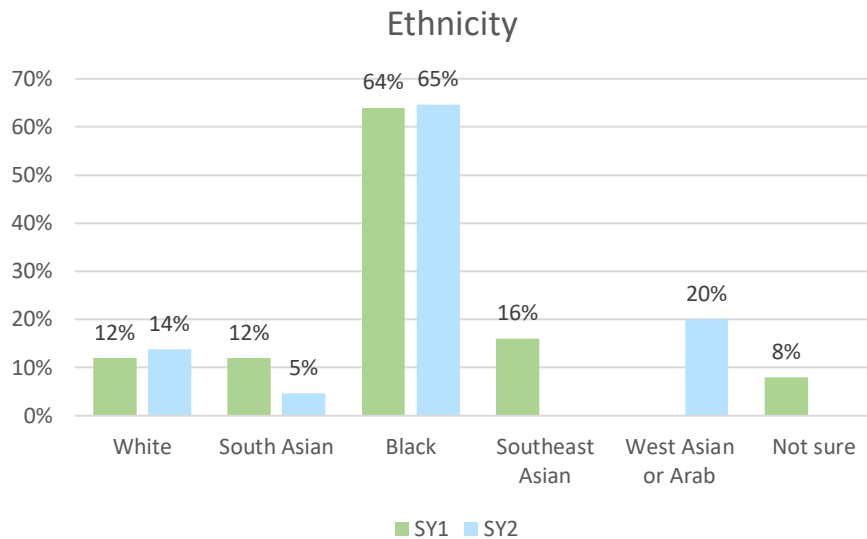
Figure 3 Survey participant gender



### Ethnicity

Participants were asked their ethnicity and were able to select all that applied from the following list: White; Chinese; South Asian; Black; Indigenous; Filipino; Latin American, Central American, South American; Southeast Asian; West Asian or Arab; Korean; Japanese; and Not sure.

Due to small sample sizes, we are not presenting granular ethnicity demographics, and only presenting results based on ethnicity categories that were selected by 5% of more of respondents to the pre-survey in both school years.

**Figure 4** Survey participant ethnicity

## Student Outcomes

Significant changes between surveys are marked by year with asterisks, with one asterisk denoting a 10% confidence level (\*), two asterisks denoting a 5% confidence level (\*\*), and three asterisks denoting a 1% confidence level (\*\*\*) .

Given the number of responses, we summarize descriptive statistics for measures with statistically significant change pre/post in either SY1 or SY2 below in Table 6. The negative (-) or positive (+) symbols denote directional change in the measure (increasing or decreasing) pre/post, unless otherwise indicated.

### *Student experiences at school*

Overall, scores related to students' psychological sense of school membership decreased, meaning students felt a decreased sense of school membership. The items driving this change mostly relate to lower feelings of belonging, being able to be oneself, feeling different from other students, and feeling respected by teachers in school.

Students in SY1 and SY2 both increased their likelihood to report completing homework assignments, as well as 'just wanting to get by' – this change was statistically significant in SY2 (not in SY1). In SY1 students were statistically significantly less likely to report being given interesting homework at the end compared to the beginning of the academic year.

In terms of peer attitudes, there were decreases in the number of students who reported having peers who felt completing high school, and working hard at school are important (statistically significant

decreases from pre to post in SY2). In SY1 there was a statistically significantly higher proportion of students who reported having close friends who had a job or volunteered regularly.

### *Student educational aspirations*

In SY1, by the end of the academic year, 65% of EiE student respondents had applied to post-secondary programs, whereas in SY2, 31% reported applying. In SY1 a statistically significantly higher number of respondents noted wanting to obtain a post-secondary qualification at the end of the academic year (than at the beginning).

### *Student wellbeing*

There was no change in SY1 EiE survey participants' reported resilience from pre/post; in SY2 there was a statistically significant reduction in the overall Child and Youth Resilience Measure scale score. In terms of individual items, across school years, students were less likely to report feeling they belonged at school at the end of the academic year compared with the start of school. Although only statistically significant in SY2, there was a decrease from pre to post in both SY1 and SY2 in students feeling they were treated fairly in their community, having opportunities to develop skills that will be useful later in life, and enjoying cultural and family traditions.

There was a statistically significantly lower proportion of students who reported a high sense of belonging in their community in SY2 (with no change in SY1), with the proportion of those students reporting a high sense of belonging dropping from 77% to 62% in Summer 2020.

A higher proportion of students reported difficulty at home across years, however this change was only statistically significant in SY2 – the main driver being a higher proportion of students reporting increased conflict at home in Summer 2020 compared to Fall 2019.

In SY1 a statistically significantly higher proportion of students reported increased interest and positive endorsement by their parents/guardians in participants attending post-secondary education, with no change in SY2 pre/post overall. There was a statistically significant reduction in students reporting parent interest in youth getting more education after high school by EiE participants in SY2.

### *Social capital and coping*

In SY1 there were statistically significant increases in the number of students reporting volunteering at least once monthly (up 19% from Fall 2018 to Summer 2019), and in students reporting they can easily get help finding work if needed. There was no statistically significant change reported pre/post for students in SY2.

Table 6 Summary of student survey outcomes pre/post, by academic year

Measure	Directional change: 18/19	Directional change: 19/20	Notes
<b>PSSM</b>	-	-	
I can really be myself at school	-*	-***	
Sometimes I feel I don't belong	+**	+**	
I feel very different from most other students	+	+*	
The teachers here respect me	-	-*	
<b>Own attitudes towards school</b>			
I am given interesting homework	-**	No change	
I complete my assignments	+	+**	
I do as little work as possible, I just want to get by	+	+**	
<b>Peer attitudes</b>			
How many of your closest friends think completing high school is very important?	-	-**	
How many of your closest friends think it's important to work hard at school?	-	-*	
How many of your closest friends have a job or volunteer regularly?	+*	-	
<b>PSE plans and aspirations</b>			
Applied to PSE (post-survey)	65%	31%	
What is the highest level of education you would like to get?	+*	-	
<b>CYRM</b>	<b>No change</b>	-***	
I have people I look up to	No change	-**	

My parents/caregivers know a lot about me	-*	-	
I try to finish what I start	No change	-**	
I solve problems without harming myself or others	+**	-	
I know where to go in my community to get help	+*	-	
I feel I belong at my school	-*	-**	
My friends stand by me during difficult times	+	-**	
I am treated fairly in my community	-	-***	
I have opportunities to develop skills that will be useful later in life	-	-***	
I enjoy my cultural and family traditions	-	-**	
<b>Sense of belonging</b>	<b>No change</b> ~80%	<b>-**</b> 77% to 62%	
<b>Home life</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+*</b>	<b>Up means worse</b>
Conflict at home	+	+***	Up 20%
<b>Parent/guardian attitudes towards PSE</b>	<b>+***</b>	<b>No change</b>	
How important is it to your parents or guardians that you get more education after high school?	No change	-*	
<b>Volunteering at least once a month or more frequently</b>	<b>+**</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Up 19% in 18/19</b>
<b>Supports: I can easily get help finding work</b>	<b>+*</b>	<b>No change</b>	

For a more detailed breakdown of scoring and change pre/post across SY1 and SY2, please see Appendix G.

## QUALITATIVE DATA: STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF EIE PROGRAMMING

### *Academic supports*

From students' perspectives, EiE programming provided a safe space (both physically, and later virtually) to access academic, social, peer, and emotional supports. Many students felt academic supports such as tutoring were directly helpful for school, however most cited the holistic nature of supports as motivating them to stay engaged with school, and achieve academically. In terms of academic outcomes, students noted that help they received from SPSWs with planning for post-secondary, both in terms of credit accumulation and the path forward during high school, and in the process of selecting and applying to specific programs, was critical to seeing PSE as a possible path, choosing to apply, and applying. Former EiE students shared that if they did not have access to EiE, they would have become disengaged in school, dropped out, and/or failed academically. Furthermore, they would not have been able to graduate and continue their education past high school.

*"I procrastinate – knowing that [SPSW] is going to ask me if I did something means I have to actually do it. None of my teachers would ask, they don't care."*

– Youth interview

Overall students interviewed wanted more academic supports, particularly in science and math, and access to academic supports in French. This was consistent across SY1 and SY2, and from multiple perspectives: students, parents, and SPSWs.

### *Life skills and coping*

Students noted they received practical supports from SPSWs such as help developing a resume and coaching related to job interviews. One former student stated their relationship with the SPSW 'saved me from trouble in school', and had the SPSW not worked with them to develop coping skills to de-escalate from 'tense' situations, they would have left school. Many stated SPSWs offered social/emotional supports not offered by teachers or school staff. To the students interviewed, a balance of fun and social interactions with educational supports was crucial to building and maintaining their relationships with the SPSWs, and their interest in the program.

### *Student- SPSW relationship*

Students shared they felt their SPSW was 'real' and 'got' the things they were going through. It was helpful to have SPSWs with diverse cultural/racial backgrounds, and lived experiences that mirrored their own – students noted that the lack of ethnically diverse teachers and teachers who identify as part of their communities was a challenge for them. Students shared that although they did not feel as though their experiences were reflected in school staff, they were reflected by SPSWs.



*“One of the constant pieces is having that caring adult in the building. While a lot of the adults in the school are [caring adults], with a semestered system kids are moving between teachers. Some of them connect to the resource teacher, but for kids who don’t make that connection elsewhere, it’s amazing.”*

– Partner interview

Students reported having a close bond with SPSWs, and as such found it difficult when SPSWs were away from work intermittently (e.g., vacation, sick leave), or when they left their positions. Students that experienced staff turnover during their participation stated the transition was difficult – they felt upset when one SPSW was leaving, eventhough they were able to connect with the new SPSW as the new SPSW made an effort to reach out and build trust early on.

They noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, SPSWs maintained contact in ways that were helpful and accessible to them – including through social media and text messages – and helped them navigate transitioning to online schooling and academic supports, although they missed the opportunity to connect in person.

### *We want more*

Overall students wanted more EiE – more time with their SPSW, longer hours, more options for tutoring, and for the program to continue. Specific recommendations were to have financial supports for transportation more widely available as the cost of public transportation often impeded their ability to participate in offsite group activities (pre-pandemic). Students voiced that having an SPSW to connect with provided them with an empathic, compassionate listening ear, and a constant support to set academic and personal goals, and to continue to work towards achieving them.

**Table 7 Summary of participant feedback, by site**

	SWAG	CHs	St. Paul HS
Program reflections	<p>Safe space</p> <p>Did better with the human interaction, one-on-one help</p> <p>Gave me the extra push to care to graduate to go beyond high school</p> <p>I would not have graduated, or have stayed in high school</p> <p>Wouldn’t know what route to take to PSE</p>	<p>Fun and interesting</p> <p>Access to YMCA</p> <p>Saved me from trouble in school</p> <p>Mix of educational support and fun – there’s a balance</p> <p>Make a resume and pass job interviews</p> <p>Lifestyle skills most important</p> <p>CH was the perfect place</p>	<p>Academic tutoring was helpful, and having SPSW as a guide</p> <p>Helpful to know there is support for post-secondary planning and applications</p> <p>SPSW provided supports to students that teachers did not</p> <p>SPSW helpful navigating school administrative issues</p>

	Would have failed	SPSW stayed late in the evening Mentorship nights were helpful – learned life skills and about other cultures Goal setting helpful	Helpful in developing a plan to work during PSE Transition from one SPSW to the next was difficult but it worked out in the end
<b>Suggested improvements</b>	Teach job skills Learning trips (not just fun trips)	More time with SPSW Private room to talk Would have kept going French language academic support	More financial support, including for driver's education courses
<b>SPSW relationship</b>	Realest one out there Always there and in touch during COVID-19	Like a therapist Loved snacks and tea time with SPSW Important to have someone to talk to Listened, was easy to talk to, has helpful advice	SPSWs were caring, took an interest in learning about students Empathetic, compassionate, and social Reached out in ways that were easier for students (social media, texts) Both SPSWs were from diverse backgrounds – unlike school staff – really helped to have people from diverse backgrounds to talk to
<b>Supports needed</b>	Losing transportation support hinders ability to attend (often just get one/back to school return)	Financial supports for food and transportation (to get to external activities -mentorship nights)	Additional financial supports for things like Driver's Education courses
<b>Transition to online programming</b>	Hard to attend online Both connectivity and psychologically		Less regular attendance online
<b>Transition to online schooling</b>	Hard to stay motivated Way too much school work online Let down of not having a graduation School work became easier, didn't need as much help		SPSW helped to remind students to keep working

Transition to socially-distanced life	Hard to meet with friends and stay safe		
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## SPSWs

### Student life circumstances – SY2

SPSWs reported EiE participants faced multiple challenges outside of school that are often the root causes of issues inside of school. All SPSWs reported that at least one of their students' households was severely food insecure, at multiple time points throughout the school year. Additionally, two SPSWs reported supporting at least one student on their respective caseload with finding housing, as students became homeless and/or precariously housed during the school year. In many cases, precipitating events such as a car accident or house fire had ripple effects for students and parents including losing mobility/transportation, housing, and income. Other stressors reported by SPSWs included students having to care for an ill family member, and, after the onset of COVID-19, having to shift focus from school to employment in order to afford food and housing.

All SPSWs reported parents voiced concerns over the safety of their neighborhoods and had raised these issues with police and school staff and felt they were not taken seriously. SPSWs noted that both parents and students reported anti-Black racism as a daily concern, both in school and in their communities. An incident involving a fatal shooting involving individuals/former students from a neighboring community affected multiple EiE students. Police targeting of the Black community, both in Ottawa, and internationally, was reported by SPSWs to be an ongoing reality for EiE students and predominantly Black communities in the city.

### Resilience

Contrary to the quantitative results indicating that student resilience decreased in SY2, both students and SPSWs shared stories of continued resilience throughout SY2. Students affected by housing loss, food insecurity, and experiences of discrimination in communities and schools, were able to continue to attend school, engage academically and socially, and cope with multiple life stressors. SPSWs reported students engaged in several career-focused community-based and extra-curricular activities including:

- Participating in, and completing, a program aimed at fostering technology and STEM skills for girls (Technovation);
- Participating in a trip to Parliament Hill;
- Volunteering to provide translation services for refugee families;

- Writing poetry while attending the Urban Legend Poetry Collective; and
- Participating in a basketball game with site staff and neighborhood police officers (which resulted in summer employment for some students).

SPSWs reported that despite multiple challenges, many students on their caseloads gained and/or maintained employment, developed and executed action plans to continue to engage academically, and pursued career-related interests such as film production, writing, and coding.

EiE students were supported to complete PSE applications, and Black students attending one school were included in a Black Students Graduation Coach program. SPSWs noted that despite myriad challenges, including the pandemic (see below), students were able to see improvement in their grades through consistent engagement in tutoring and hard work, pass courses they were previously failing, and make use of study and tutoring time more effectively. At the time of interviews, several students had received offers from university and college programs, and others were planning their applications.

SPSWs shared their perspectives and experiences of shaping and delivering the SPSW role/service across their respective sites. Overall, SPSWs provided one-on-one support to students and families, *and* acted as a link to other community supports and opportunities for students. They also acted as advocates and intermediaries when students reported experiencing discrimination and being confronted with barriers to accessing supports and participating in opportunities at school and within the community – both at the individual and community levels.

As one-on-one supports, SPSWs provided individual supports to students including:

- Helping students transition from middle to high school;
- Supporting students to cope with bullying and discrimination;
- Supporting students to cope with disciplinary actions at school such as suspensions, and students' perceptions of being targeted by teachers;
- Helping integrate new students within the existing EiE student group and programming;
- Supporting students to attend a leadership camp offered by a school; and
- Linking students with vital day-to-day supports such as financial supports for transportation, food, and supports to find stable housing.

SPSWs and students reported that a large part of their role was to spend time with students building relationships and trust, offering emotional support, and providing support with developmental tasks such as drafting a resume, and applying to jobs.

In addition to directly providing services, SPSWs acted as a link for students to other programs, services, and opportunities. Below is a summary table of referrals made/reported by SPSWs to other programs/services during SY2:

Table 8 Referral summary

Referral topic	Total	
	#	%
Sports funding	9	13%
Employment	12	18%
Counselling and mental health	7	10%
Addiction services	1	1%
Legal support	2	3%
Academic	11	16%
Medical	1	1%
Food security	7	10%
Recreation	12	18%
Other	5	7%
Total	67	100%

In addition to these services, SPSWs also linked EiE students with events in their communities including opportunities to volunteer with seniors, participate in Pathways to Education Ottawa programming, mentoring trips, and recreational activities such as boxing and basketball. During Black History Month, SPSWs connected students to an event hosted by the Pathways to Education Ottawa team during which scholars facilitated a conversation about Black history and its representation – or lack thereof – within education systems. One SPSW noted that:

*Students were able to continue this conversation after the event, and were excited to have a candid conversation about their experiences with racism and the lack of Black educators in the school system.*

Eight EiE students and an SPSW were able to see Michelle Obama speak, and found the experience empowering and enlightening. This opportunity also sparked an ongoing conversation about resilience, and the important role of education and the school environment in fostering belonging and resilience for students.

SPSWs also reported acting as advocates on behalf of EiE students, particularly within the context of school. Near the beginning the academic year (in SY2), multiple EiE students (n=9) received early intervention letters, a tool teachers use to communicate with the parents/guardians of students who are struggling in their courses, that SPSWs were also able to use to tailor academic supports for EiE students. SPSWs stated they often initiated conversations with teachers, and school administrators, to address policies that were exacerbating academic and life challenges faced by students. For example, one school had a policy stating that after a certain number of consecutive absences, a student is automatically withdrawn, without considering the cause of the absences. In one instance, a student was faced with the potential of being removed from school, rather than being supported through the difficult life circumstances that were causing the absences and finding an alternate path that could support attendance. SPSWs helping school staff understand root causes of student behaviours was another theme across SPSWs and sites.

Financial barriers to participation in activities in school were reported by SPSWs as critical sources of inequitable access to opportunities for students from low-income households. Costs for students to participate in in-school sports (activity and equipment fees), academic enrichment courses, leadership opportunities, and arts-based activities would have prevented EiE students from participating had the SPSW not been there to intervene. SPSWs were also able to link students with financial supports for EiE students to apply to PSE, and link with Pathways to Education Ottawa to attend group PSE application nights.

Finally, SPSWs reported supporting students through experiences of racism and discrimination experienced at school – either via policies or individual teacher/staff actions. Examples of policies that were problematic for EiE students included student and SPSW reports of ‘head gear’ bans in classrooms targeted specifically at durags and students concern that educators were conflating durags with gang activity, and policies related to chronic absences (as mentioned above). Individual actions include the use of derogatory terms (such as the ‘N’ word) by school staff, experiences of students being targeted by teachers – scrutinizing Black and Muslim students’ behaviour, and microaggressions by teachers towards Black students in class, particularly if they were struggling with a concept and/or asking for help. Another related concern cited by participants was incidents where racism and discrimination between students was not adequately dealt with by staff, such as students getting into physical fights with people who use racial slurs against them being punished for the physical fight, without addressing the racism that initially drove the incident.

SPSWs noted they spent time de-escalating acts of discrimination or racism, and supporting the students experiencing that discrimination and racism, as well as raising awareness with school staff of resources and supports available for EiE students. One SPSW noted working closely with a principal who has been a champion in addressing anti-Black racism within the school system, attending meetings to discuss ways to combat structural racism at multiple levels.

## COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed how schools and the EiE program operated. At the same time, there were multiple cases of widely publicized murders of Black individuals by police in the United States, as well as locally. Both COVID-19, and the ongoing, violent manifestation of police brutality towards people of colour, cannot be understated in terms of their respective impact on EiE students' experiences – which are reflected in the data collected from SPSWs and students.

SPSWs supported students coping with the transition to online schooling, and EiE's move to virtual connection and programming, from March 2020 onwards. Many EiE students' households experienced lack of access to equipment – laptops, computers – as well as effective internet connectivity. Students and parents reported a lack of space for students to complete work. Many students reported feeling overwhelmed by online schooling, finding it much more time-intensive, while some students felt that although online learning was challenging, the pressure to perform academically was reduced as final exams were cancelled and grades could not be lower than they were prior to the switch to online schooling (Pringle, 2020). Overall, students and SPSWs reported concerns related to student academic achievement in terms of concrete milestones – such as credit accumulation, grades in the lead up to graduation and post-secondary education – and in terms of managing school online.

Socially, SPSWs and students themselves, reported students struggling with being and feeling isolated from their friends, as well as the loss of extra-curricular activities and opportunities (including sports and employment). Uncertainty was a constant across multiple aspects of EiE students' lives, with many reporting having to shift focus from education/school to employment in order to support their families.

EiE staff reported working to collaborate with students and organizations to explore how best to connect with students and families to ease the experience of quarantine, and other aspects of COVID-19. Students reported it was helpful that SPSWs used modes of communication – like Instagram, text, Messenger – that were accessible and familiar to them in order to stay in touch. Many students reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of virtual engagement for school and socially and appreciated being able to stay in contact through using brief methods of connection.

## IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

Having multiple sites allowed for variation in contexts to explore implementation strengths and challenges. A spectrum emerged in the data depending on the level of structure within existing site programming and the clarity of SPSW role scope. St. Paul, the only in-school site, provided the most structure within which an SPSW operated, followed by SWAG, and then the Community Houses. Each sites' programming was responsive to the communities served. At the CH sites, where staff tend to provide holistic, person-centered supports within a community setting, the boundary between SPSW-specific supports and CH supports was blurred. In addition, the large age range of students served at the CHs, and that there were two physical sites served by the CH SPSW across a vast geographic distance, created challenges for that SPSW. At the SWAG site, where the SPSW was introduced to extend supports historically provided to Grade 9 and 10 students to Grade 11 and 12 students, the intent was for

participants to see the EiE SPSW role as an extension of the SWAG programming, with the only difference being student age/grade. While this was successful in regard to student perspectives of programming, there were challenges relating to clearly delineating job tasks and reporting structures at an administrative level.

In general, housing an SPSW within a site where students and families often attend other programming was viewed as a strength – and was part of the initial decision-making process driving site selection. For an SPSW or SPSW-like position to be sustainable within community sites (as opposed to operating from a centralized location), clarifying the scope of the role, reporting relationships, and relationship between the SPSW role and site activities is vital.

## SPSWs

SPSWs noted that at the outset of each academic year, it was a challenge to balance and prioritize multiple program aspects including student registration, evaluation consent, and individual student and family needs. Particularly at the Community Houses, it was difficult navigating across two sites, and maintaining clarity of scope about the SPSW role while embedded in CH programming.

In some cases, SPSWs noted that balancing group versus individual student needs was difficult (during in-person tutoring, pre-pandemic). One example shared was that at times, a small number of students could be disruptive in the tutoring space, and in an effort to ensure the space continued to be welcoming to all students, the SPSW needed to work with the students who were being disruptive (to develop, and commit to, a contract of tutoring space expectations) at the expense of other students.

Parent engagement continued to be an area that SPSWs noted as critical, and at times, challenging – both in terms of being able to connect with parents, as well as spending time reviewing program and school materials. SPSWs reported to SRDC that the amount of registration material, inclusive of evaluation information and consent forms, was overwhelming for many parents. Although embedding the evaluation consent within program registration processes was found to be the most effective way to connect with parents about EiE's evaluation, it also meant the length of time dedicated to administrative tasks with parents was increased – sometimes at the beginning of the relationship.

## Community Sites and EiE

Community site staff reported that being connected with EiE SPSWs, and PQCHC was a strength of the project, at the program, organizational, and community-level.

At the program level, staff at the Community House and SWAG sites reported that the connections SPSWs had with schools was very helpful and addressed a need/gap within communities. The SPSW filling this gap – a lack of a resource to assist families and community organizations with school-based issues, navigating school systems – was valuable to delivery partners. Similarly, at the St. Paul site, where the SPSW operated out of space at the school, the SPSW's connection to other community



organizations, programs, and services was valuable to school staff. All delivery partners noted that having an extra ‘staff’ to provide holistic supports to young people, particularly students facing barriers, and assist them in navigating multiple systems/situations, was a strength. This strength existed in terms of students having more one-on-one time with a caring adult, as well as in terms of the SPSWs’ abilities to connect students, schools, and organizations within and across communities. SPSWs were viewed as an important ‘bridge’ between community organizations, schools, and families.

Another strength or perceived benefit shared by delivery partners was EiE’s connection with Pathways to Education Ottawa and programs hosted by PQCHC. Specifically, delivery partners mentioned benefits to students such as having access to Pathways to Education Ottawa’s academic tutoring, financial supports, mentorship and opportunities to build life skills, out trips, and post-secondary mentoring and support with PSE applications. Financial supports provided by EiE were viewed as critical to student success – especially for students facing challenges related to food insecurity and housing instability.

Delivery partners emphasized that communication between SPSWs and program sites was excellent, even after the onset of COVID-19. The SPSWs remained in contact with site staff and continued to provide critical supports so students could remain engaged in school.

## Program challenges

One challenge identified by delivery partners across sites was the scope of the SPSW role/EiE programming, and how this interacted with site needs and existing programming. For example, at the CH sites, the SPSW was ‘stretched’ between two sites, and site staff noted they wanted more of the SPSW’s time at each CH. In addition to the scope of SPSWs’ roles at each site, there was reported confusion on the part of community site staff about to whom SPSWs were supposed to report (site staff or EiE managers), indicating a lack of clarity about who determined/defined the scope of their role.

At the Community Houses, site staff stated it was difficult to put the SPSW role ‘in a box’ (i.e. academic or education-focused supports) as CHs provide holistic supports to families. They also noted that in terms of content, the SPSW and site staff had a difficult time securing wrap around supports, such as academic supports for Gr. 11 science and math.

At SWAG, site staff noted that with the introduction of the EiE SPSW providing support to Grade 11 and 12 students (expanding the existing program which served Gr. 9 and 10 students), EiE was ‘trying to do double the work with only one more staff person’. Staff noted it would be more helpful to have funding for another staff facilitator, and to build out more specific programming for Gr. 11 and 12 students to distinguish supports for older vs. younger students. At SWAG, staff also noted that because of the close relationships between SWAG and EiE students, there was an awareness by students of the different financial supports available to EiE students through the project funding. For example, EiE students were provided with gift cards in December and at the end of the school year, highlighting discrepancies in access between students.

At St. Paul, the demand for SPSW services exceeded the SPSW's caseload capacity – school staff wanted 'more people, more resources' to provide EiE supports. Site staff stated that more financial resources were needed for transportation for students – to attend tutoring, employment, recreational activities; and food, to break the cycle of poverty and meet students' basic needs so they can engage in school.

Another challenge noted particularly by SWAG and St. Paul was the impact of staff turnover on student engagement. Although site staff noted the transition was managed well at both sites, they felt that every time a new SPSW is introduced, it 'takes a while for the program to build momentum with students again'. This was echoed by SPSWs in their interviews, noting that staff turnover also influenced program accountability to sites and to systems-level change.

### Sustainability: Looking forward

Overall, staff across all sites noted they would like to continue to be connected to EiE/Pathways to Education Ottawa, beyond the length of the EiE pilot project. They spoke to the benefits of having Pathways/PQCHC as a hub organization coordinating and building networks between stakeholders, organizations, and programs across the city. All sites were interested in continuing to partner with Pathways to Education Ottawa/PQCHC and be able to connect with Pathways to Education Ottawa about opportunities for students such as employment supports, job fairs, and training opportunities. Ultimately, all three sites would have liked funding for the SPSW position to continue – staff from each site noted that having more SPSWs would be a benefit to their programs.

As noted, implementation factors differed according to the site and organizational factors such as existing site program structure, level of existing partnership with PQCHC and Pathways to Education, and the structure of the type of service delivery within each site. Making the scope of the SPSW role within each site clear from the outset involves ongoing communication between the SPSW and site staff, and between EiE managers and sites, including regarding SPSW reporting relationships.

The strength of the network and partnerships developed, as a result of SPSWs' role across sites was a particularly strong theme – in addition to wanting the SPSW to continue at each site, sites were eager to continue to maintain network partnerships and relationships. All three sites viewed the relationships SPSWs helped to build between schools and community organizations as extremely valuable – whether from the perspective of a school site (St. Paul), or community sites. In terms of timing, there was a sense that momentum and relationships with SPSWs, and with EiE and PQCHC, built over the three-year time horizon of the LPRF funding, and that finding a way to fund or support these to be maintained would continue to improve student experiences and access to academic and other vital supports.

Table 9 Implementation findings, by site

Pilot site	Implementation factors				SPSW experiences	Partner experiences
	Existing program infrastructure	Existing partnership with PQ	Staff turnover	Coordination factors		
<b>SWAG</b>	Program staff in place to support students in Grades 9-10	Existing knowledge of Pathways program, strong organizational ties with PQ and Carlington as both are CHCs.	<i>SPSW: SY1</i> <i>EiE Manager: Summer 2019</i>	Reporting relationships unclear for site staff	Familiarity with site and staff, and students Increased awareness of PtE financial supports	Overstretched program support staff for doubling of student body Interest in continuing with SPSW role/staff to support Gr.11 & 12 students
<b>Community Houses</b>	Pilot sites of Innoweave pilot project.	Strong historical relationship with PQCHC's Community Houses	<i>SPSW: SY1</i> <i>EiE Manager: Summer 2019</i>	One SPSW for two Community Houses Geographic distance between sites – difficult for coordinating transportation for activities across sites	Building on existing engagement to reach parents Not enough time because split between two locations Filling a void in services within organizations with limited resources– can never meet need	Strength of having another caring adult to provide support to students and families within a responsive, community-based setting Interest in having more SPSW time/positions Value the connection made with schools and other community agencies.
<b>St. Paul</b>	Pathways to Education serving a small number of eligible students in school already	Longstanding relationship with Pathways at school and school board levels	<i>SPSW: SY2</i> <i>EiE Manager: Summer 2019</i>	Administrative layers at school created challenges to direct advocacy for individual students	Building relationships took time after first SPSW left Building awareness among school staff and community on equity issues	Interest in continuing with funding Excellent communication with EiE and the SPSW throughout Student need for supportive adult providing social/emotional supports is high

# DISCUSSION

## CONTEXTUALIZING OUTCOMES

Our findings related to student experiences at school and resilience, particularly in SY2, must be interpreted in the context of global events and movements including the pandemic, Black Lives Matter, and the effects thereof on students served by EiE. The shock of the COVID-19 pandemic to the academic year cannot be understated – for all students, but particularly for students in their final year of high school. The effects of COVID-19 on many EiE students’ and families’ abilities to cope broadly – having access to food, stable housing, and income security – as well as students’ ability to continue to engage with academics were compounded by existing stressors and challenges associated with living in poverty.

Two overarching themes emerged that can help us better contextualize the evaluation findings: race and the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly as it intersects with economic inequality, as well as program responsiveness to those issues.

### Race and student belonging

Fostering student belonging in any community, and particularly at school, is a critical educational, social, and policy objective in many school systems (Osterman, 2000). In adolescence, belonging to one’s community, and to one’s school community specifically, is a determinant of health and mental health, as well as being a contributing factor in interpersonal and academic outcomes (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993; Osterman, 2000). Indeed, “one of the most fundamental reforms needed in secondary or high school education is to make schools into better communities of caring and support for young people” (Hargreaves, Earl, Ryan, 1996).

Student survey results related to identity at school, including items in the PSSM scale and CYRM, indicated students were less likely to feel as though they belonged, were respected by teachers, or could be themselves at school as the school year progressed. These findings were triangulated with qualitative findings drawn from multiple perspectives, highlighting that EiE students of colour (comprising over 80% of the EiE student population in SY2) encountered both individual-level, and policy-level instances of identity erasure. These instances included overt instances of anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism at school, such as verbal attacks and perceived targeting of individual students, as well as discrimination and erasure of identity at a school policy-level, such as restrictions on culturally centric dress and inadequate responses to incidents of racism within the student body. This finding is in line with literature exploring the relationship between race and belonging at school in the United States, which finds that promoting students’ racial identity – Black identity – is central to Black students receiving a first-rate education (Gray, 2017; Griffin et al., 2020; Sánchez et al., 2018). Conversely, erasure of racial history, identity and cultural traditions in curricula and school policy continues to promote systemic racism and prevent opportunities to increase self-understanding and wellbeing (Mettler, 2017). The body

of literature examining race, belonging, and secondary education in Canada is growing; many have documented the context of denial within Canadian education systems related to anti-Black racism, and the need to move towards an African-centered pedagogy (Howard, 2014; James, 2012).

EiE did take action to support students dealing with racism in schools and in the community, through both support during individual incidents, and through providing youth with opportunities to collaboratively discuss and organize among themselves. This is aligned with best practices outlined in the literature for promoting racialized students' sense of belonging at school by increasing students' coping skills in response to race-related stress at school, and promoting pride in their racial identity (Gray, 2017; Griffin et al., 2020; Sánchez et al., 2011; Sánchez et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2019). From literature exploring natural mentoring relationships, and relational-based interventions for students identifying as racialized, having "one adult who is crazy about you" can influence interpersonal, social, and educational outcomes when students feel connected to their mentors and peers (Sánchez et al., 2011; Sánchez et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2014; Hurd & Sellers, 2013).

The decrease in students' overall sense of belonging in their communities was also echoed by SPSWs and site staff, and dropped from being on par with the national average of young Canadians aged 16-24 reporting a high sense of belonging (77%), to 62% in Summer 2020. When placed in context of the ongoing violence, police brutality both in the United States (e.g. the murder of George Floyd), and locally (i.e. the trial of Const. Daniel Montsion in relation to the death of Somali-Canadian Abdirahman Abdi in Ottawa), and student reports of feeling unsafe in their communities from Spring into Summer 2020, this finding is perhaps unsurprising.

## Economic equity and the effects of COVID-19

Also perhaps unsurprising, considering the pandemic and the resulting forced social distancing and periods of 'lockdown' beginning in March 2020, are findings that a higher proportion of students reported increased levels of conflict in the home in Summer 2020 (as compared with Fall 2019). As of March 2020, students were likely spending an increased amount of time in their homes with their families, potentially with limited space and privacy, in addition to dealing with added stressors related to the pandemic.

Emerging data on COVID-19 cases in Ottawa have also identified that communities that are poorer, and home to a higher proportion of recent immigrants and people of colour are experiencing higher rates of infection than other, more affluent communities (Jones, 2020). While research on this is emerging, possible explanations that have been put forward to date include: that those communities have higher representation among occupations that are unable to work from home (e.g., cleaners, Uber drivers, essential workers in general), and a lack of adequate housing (Glowacki, 2020).

Multiple perspectives indicated the important role of the SPSW in students continuing to engage in school and extra-curricular activities (where possible) after the onset of COVID-19. The digital divide was apparent – a number of students and/or households were without adequate hardware, internet connectivity, or space to complete their schoolwork, despite efforts from both schools and community

organizations to distribute computers to students and families in need. These constraints also limited their abilities to socialize with peers and stay connected to their SPSW. Research on internet access and usage in Canada indicates that while access to the internet continues to rise in Canada, % of Canadians aged 15 and older did not use the Internet as of 2018, and 6% of Canadian homes did not have Internet access (Statistics Canada, 2019). Previous research conducted in 2010 found that individuals in the highest income category had nearly five times higher odds of having access to the internet than those in the lowest income category; with recent immigrants to Canada also significantly less likely to have internet access than earlier immigrants and Canadian born residents (Haight, Quan-Haase & Corbett, 2014). Among those who had access, those with the highest income category participated in more online activities than those in the lowest income category (Haight, Quan-Haase & Corbett, 2014).

In Fall 2020, PQCHC and EiE conducted a needs assessment with Pathways to Education Ottawa and EiE students and families focusing on student and family access to hardware, space, and internet connectivity; navigating academic experiences (both online, in-person, and in hybrid schooling contexts); and overall wellbeing. Results of the needs assessment echo the qualitative findings from Summer 2020, and indicate that approximately 15% of families faced inaccess to equipment, space, and connectivity to be able to do schoolwork at home. In addition, they highlight the concern from students and parents about safety in the context of COVID-19, the inability to connect as much with peers and supports due to restrictions in place; and the need for older children to take a larger role in supporting their younger siblings with at-home schooling and other household responsibilities.

In the context of these challenges, an emerging best practice is for SPSWs and other youth workers to connect with youth using brief/messaging-based social media platforms that do not require large amounts of time/bandwidth to engage with, and to allow youth to opt-out from video components and use audio-only communication instead.

These findings are also in line with literature related to the disparities in effects related to COVID-19 experienced by racialized youth and families, and youth and families living in poverty. Great disparities in access to resources needed to do school work exist. These resources may be directly linked to schooling (i.e. school supplies, technology, space, and internet connectivity), but also importantly, are linked to income security, food security, and housing stability. Many young people living in homes with parents or guardians for whom income sources/jobs are precarious, experienced even greater income precarity after the onset of the pandemic. This meant students had to shift focus to earning income to cover their households' basic needs. Although this phenomenon is happening in real-time, existing and emerging literature supports the compounding nature of COVID-19 for those living in poverty, on multiple determinants of health and wellbeing (both short and long-term), including education and employment.

## Program responsiveness

In light of the external shocks and challenges throughout 2020, EiE, PQCHC, and programs and services across the city of Ottawa have aimed to find ways to respond to student and family needs given ever-changing regulations and realities. Through conversations with students, SPSWs, and site staff, it is clear

that the continuation of the student-SPSW relationship was critical to many students in staying engaged in school and connected to a community. The importance of the relationship – which was built during SY2 largely offline (in-person, throughout the Fall and up to March 2020) – was voiced from all perspectives. What this means for ongoing programming presents critical questions related to programming:

- How can relationships be built online, from scratch, between SPSWs and new students?
- What is the most effective balance between one-on-one, relationship-based supports, and supports that are less relational based, but found to be helpful to multiple students (e.g., PSE application nights; financial supports)?

In other words, the *relationship* has emerged repeatedly as the ‘secret sauce’ in the data across sites and school years – how can EiE/Pathways, and other programs faced with restrictions to connecting in-person, deliver responsive services and connect virtually ‘from scratch’?

## ADDRESSING EVALUATION QUESTIONS

### Question 1

*How does this pillar of support (provided by the SPSW) differ when it is part of a comprehensive/wrap around program versus when it is community-based?*

- The role of SPSW is valued, both for the direct one-on-one relational benefits to students and families, and for SPSWs’ abilities to connect students/families with resources and connect schools with community organizations.
- In this case, the wrap around, one-stop-shop, fully resourced Pathways to Education Ottawa model is the inevitable comparator as EiE was housed under the same umbrella organization (PQCHC). Based on geographic distance to PQCHC, EiE students had varying levels of access to Pathways events, resources, and networks (i.e. St. Paul was closest, and CH sites were furthest away). Many students were aware through peer networks, the supports available to Pathways students and compared their access to financial supports, activities, and resources to that of Pathways students. The most successful models were those in which both SPSWs and participants being able to access both their community-specific supports and services, as well as the supports and services offered by Pathways to Education Ottawa and PQCHC.
- Staff turnover continued to be a concern in terms of program momentum and relationship building over time – when thinking about a single SPSW nested within satellite sites compared with multiple SPSWs working under the same roof, it is clear that for a relationship-based intervention, working within a group setting is beneficial in terms of consistency of *someone*

being present, and students continuing to have access to resources and supports even when faced with individual staff changes.

- Although each community site’s student eligibility criteria, setting, and structure were different, SPSW roles filled multiple, significant needs across sites. These needs included the presence of a caring adult who could build a trusting, supportive relationship with students, an advocate for students within schools and other systems, and a liaison between students, families, schools, and community organizations, programs and services.
- Within a partnership-based service delivery approach (in comparison to within the Pathways to Education structure), the SPSW role scope and reporting relationships need to be clearly communicated on an ongoing basis with site staff. Without a centralized hub for SPSWs, and a centralized site to operate from, SPSWs may require more support to delineate their role within community organization sites to ensure they are able to meet student needs within given time and resource parameters, as well as to access a larger network of youth workers to collaboratively address challenging situations that may emerge within their caseload.

## Question 2

*To what extent did youth and families engage with the EiE SPSWs and how did this differ across the pilots, time, and different sub-groups of youth?*

- Across sites, school years, and perspectives, the power of the relationships that SPSWs develop with students is consistently found to be a critical element of the EiE program, and a critical mechanism by which students engage with programming, and ultimately achieve academic outcomes as a result. Participating youth largely talked about their relationships with individual SPSWs, rather than the supports of the overarching program those SPSWs were working within.
- Relationships take time to build, and for students who have higher needs and are facing multiple barriers to accessing educational supports, achieving their educational goals, and accessing basic necessities – food, shelter, safety – SPSWs became a multi-faceted support system. When a student’s individual level of need is high, even short absences (like SPSW’s vacations) can influence students’ journeys. For all students who have built a relationship with an SPSW, when an SPSW leaves their position, the transition to another SPSW is difficult and takes time. Ensuring there is an opportunity to ‘bridge’ from one SPSW to the next, and that there is frequent contact with students when an SPSW starts their role can help mitigate the impact of the change in relationship.
- Having SPSWs in community settings, and ‘meeting youth where they’re at’ was a strength of the EiE-SPSW structure. Existing relationships, credibility, and comfort of students at the CH and SWAG sites were instrumental in helping build the relationships between students and SPSWs. Students noted sites provided a safe space where they felt comfortable being, and that felt at home to them. Similarly, the SPSW’s space within the school setting provided a safe space



for students during their school day, and the efficacy of the St. Paul SPSW was predicated on a strong existing relationship between PQCHC/Pathways to Education and the school/school board, which allowed the SPSW to work collaboratively with teaching staff to support students.

- At SWAG, the structure within which students were engaged was fairly well established at the outset of EiE– the SPSW provided ongoing supports to Gr. 11 and 12 students (previously SWAG was offered to Gr. 9 and 10 students). This meant the SPSW was embedded within existing SWAG programming – students recommended tailoring academic supports to older students’ needs (more specialized academic supports).
  - At the CHs, the sites were embedded within students’ neighborhoods and many students themselves, as well as their siblings, parents, and other family members, already engaged in programming at the CH sites. The SPSW engaged at fixed times with students at two sites and was able to provide relationship-based supports in addition to academic supports, coordinating with youth outreach workers at each site.
  - At St. Paul, the SPSW role was an addition within the school, and the SPSW’s role had to be defined within the system of other student supports, such as guidance counsellors and social workers.
  - At all sites, EiE students – a majority of whom identified as Black or of Arab descent – emphasized the importance of having a SPSW who reflected their ethnocultural/racial backgrounds as important to relationship-building and trust. Students noted that having a person of colour in the SPSW role was powerful as often their own identities were not reflected by adults in support roles (particularly at school).
- Having networks of service providers, programs, and organizations to which SPSWs could refer students was critical as some students required connection to multiple supports including mental health services, specialized health services, housing supports, and income support. SPSWs’ role in exploring whether students are having their basic needs met – food, housing, income – and making necessary referrals to stabilize access to these, was critical. Obvious but important considerations emerged: focusing on educational attainment without having basic needs met exacerbates stressors for students. In addition, operating EiE through PQCHC’s existing program allowed participants to access PQCHC and Pathways to Education Ottawa supports. For example, graduating students from SWAG and St. Paul were able to leverage the post-secondary application supports available through Pathways to Education. Access to PQCHC was somewhat limited for CH participants, due to geographic constraints.

### Question 3

*What was the experience of youth and their families participating in EiE – both as a group and within each pilot – in terms of: their awareness of, and connection to community supports; students’*

*attendance, sense of belonging, interaction (behaviour), and achievement at school; and school systems' responses to students with social, emotional, academic, and behavioural challenges.*

- Across school years and sites, students requested more access to financial supports (e.g. transportation subsidies); more access to recreational activities (or transportation to rec centres); specialized academic supports for older students (science, math, and French language academic supports); employment and job-seeking supports; and more time with their SPSW. Parents noted that SPSWs were helpful in connecting students and their families with a wide range of community supports including support with employment, mental health services, and financial supports for transportation and food.
- In terms of school achievement and experience, many students across school years, sites, and grades, noted that without connection with their SPSW, they would not have stayed engaged, or as engaged with school. Students, parents, and site staff reported that SPSWs played multiple roles in supporting students, including:

  - **Advocating** for students to be supported at school, by school staff, including eliminating individual funding barriers for student participation in school activities (e.g., sports, leadership opportunities); and for systems to explore and address root causes of student behaviours as opposed to focusing on immediate presenting behaviour (e.g., lateness, absences, 'disruptiveness'). Access to schools did vary by site, with the CH SPSW experiencing some challenges connecting with school staff due to the large number of high schools represented in that caseload and the lack of a pre-existing relationship between those schools and Pathways to Education Ottawa or SWAG, in comparison with the other pilot sites.
  - **Providing academic supports**, including direct academic supports such as tutoring; as well as supports related to choosing to apply to post secondary programs, selection of post-secondary programs, completing applications, and applying for financial support, such as OSAP and scholarships. These supports were provided by SPSWs, and SPSWs also linked students with mentorship opportunities related to PSE and financial supports to complete PSE applications.
  - **Connecting to other services and opportunities**, including career and interest-focused programs (e.g., Technovation, Urban Legend Poetry Collective); employment opportunities; and recreational activities. Many specialized programs were made available to EiE participants through the partnership with Pathways to Education Ottawa, which extended access to those activities to the pilot participants. SPSWs also directly supported job-seeking activities (e.g., help with resume-building, interview coaching), and with external opportunities – leadership camps, external speakers, workshops.
  - **Discussing strategies to cope with structural discrimination** both in the community and at school. SPSWs offered individual and group activities/supports for students

across school years, and particularly in SY2 when ongoing structural violence and discrimination towards Black communities in the United States was more prominently reported in the media, and directly experienced locally.

## Question 4

### *How has EiE been able to respond, adapt, and accommodate external shocks (COVID, BLM)?*

SPSWs were able to shift the mode of delivery of their services and supports, and the content to be responsive to students' needs from the onset of the pandemic (March 2020), to the end of programming in December 2020.

- SPSWs began to engage with students virtually, as in-person programming was suspended in March 2020. SPSWs attempted multiple modes of engagement online including virtual video chats, Instagram, and text-based communications. Due to the shift to virtual schooling, and student overwhelm at connecting virtually across all facets of life, SPSWs found that using briefer methods of communication (e.g., text messages, direct messages through Instagram and Messenger) was a more efficient and useful way to connect with students.
- Both formally and informally, SPSWs reported hosting conversations about racism with EiE students, including how to cope with individual and group targeting at school and in the community, as well as addressing individual issues of racism and discrimination with students as they emerged. SPSWs also connected students with opportunities to participate in workshops/hear speakers discussing anti-Black racism in schools, Black identity, and youth empowerment and resilience.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ...FOR PROGRAMS

We heard from multiple perspectives, and consistently across sites and time, that students from low-income neighborhoods in Ottawa benefit in myriad ways from having access to an SPSW. These benefits differ across individual students according to need and educational stage (academic grade and age), and include: remaining engaged with school, accessing essential supports and resources, and expanding their networks of opportunities and activities. EiE students reported facing many challenges that interfered with achieving academic objectives including: housing and food insecurity, experiences of structural racism, mental health issues, relationship issues at home and with peers, community safety, and difficulty understanding academic content. SPSWs supported students in navigating a continuum of issues through individual coaching, systemic intervention and advocacy, and connecting students to

other services. In order to replicate and scale EiE, what we learned about placing this individual support role within community-based settings is:

- It is critical to understand the existing structure, need for services, and programming at host sites, and how an SPSW would fit within these. Following this, establishing role clarity in terms of scope of duties, times and days at each site, and reporting mechanisms is vital to promoting staff retention and clear understanding of the opportunities and boundaries of supports an SPSW can offer.
- Building relationships and partnerships with local schools is an integral component that allows SPSWs to advocate effectively for students, in terms of academic achievement, and also to help address issues of economic inequity and support students' well-being.
- Having SPSWs whose lived experiences and backgrounds reflect the communities they serve is important to building relationships with students, as well as promoting and including the identities of racialized students within programs and services, and at school.
- The demand for SPSW services far exceeds the supply of SPSWs, youth outreach workers, and holistic supports for youth within low-income neighbourhoods. All sites want more – more SPSWs, more staff to support youth, and more time from SPSWs and SPSW services.
- Addressing root causes of inequity means helping students and families ensure their basic needs – food, shelter, safety – are being met. Expanding SPSWs/programs' abilities to provide financial resources for food and transportation; network with and connect students and families to relevant services in communities; and help families navigate multiple systems are central to helping students most at risk for disengagement. Finding a balance between academic, financial, relational, and advocacy supports is essential for program sustainability.
- Program content must be tailored to age and stage of education, primary learning language (English, French), and be able to support students in more advanced subjects, particularly for older students.
- Dedicated funding, resources, and supports are needed to retain staff and ensure that they have the time needed to both engage effectively with youth and families, as well as time to build and maintain relationships with schools and community resources.

## ...FOR SYSTEMS

Equity in education remains an issue at multiple levels, and affects individual students and families differentially depending on myriad factors at the intersection of poverty, race, structural discrimination, and other lived experiences. Most (~85%) students served by EiE live at that intersection – a single program or individual service provider can support, advocate, and mitigate risk factors, as well as help to enhance protective factors, however the root causes of these issues exist within and across multiple

systems and at a broader societal level. The collective impact initiative was developed in order to move collectively towards building solutions to inequities in education in Ottawa, along with their root causes. Through EiE's evaluation, we reaffirm that there remains a disconnect between school systems' policies and practices and the evidence-based best practices with respect to addressing root causes of inequity at individual student, and system-levels. Following from findings, based on multiple perspectives throughout this evaluation, we recommend:

- Schools explore strategies to include, promote, and integrate diverse identities within their policies, curricula, and practices, and increase the diversity of school staff to better represent the communities in which they operate.
- Continue activities spearheaded by school and school board leaders across Ottawa to address anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism in schools; and provide on-going training to school personnel related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) best practices.

## ...FOR NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Coordinating a collective impact initiative requires unique expertise and dedicated commitment and, as a result, would be most effective run by a dedicated body with a relevant core mandate as a backbone organization. This can help ensure effective outreach and partnership building, and consistency of work beyond individual program funding. A backbone organization with a core mandate and dedicated funding related to collective impact could also help address the innate difficulty in developing and maintaining collaboration between organizations that both want to provide the best services for their participants and may be competing with each other for funding, or who may be operating within program specific funding systems that allow limited time for coordination and partnership building.
- There is a need to map existing collective impact initiatives and networks in place across the city, to encourage coordination and reduce duplication, particularly across different domains (e.g., education, housing, mental health) for more holistic youth supports.
- Continue to build on the momentum of having liaisons between community organizations, communities, and schools. All SPSWs noted the importance of building relationships with schools that allowed SPSWs to advocate directly on behalf of students with teachers and other school staff. This was particularly facilitated by the St. Paul HS pilot site, where the SPSW was embedded directly within the school, but was still linked to a community-based program through connections to PQCHC and Pathways to Education Ottawa.
- Identify gaps and plans to address those gaps that are feasible and actionable by the networks and partner members. In determining action plans, set clear and measurable targets that will contribute to reducing those gaps, and track progress towards those targets over time. This can help focus networks and partnerships towards specific goals, maintain and grow commitment, and ensure accountability to communities.

## ...FOR EVALUATION

- Quantitative measures may not reflect individual change as much as reaction to or perception of systems issues. Without a comparison group, interpreting changes within EiE participants is problematic, particularly in SY2: changes cannot be tied to program participation. Look to qualitative methods and data to understand student experiences and interpret survey findings, and how students and parents indicate ‘what would have been’ in the absence of having access to an SPSW.
- The intent to embed evaluation within programming and create a useful tool (a ‘dashboard’) comprised of measures with flags pre/post for SPSWs to review with students had buy-in early on from SPSWs and EiE staff. However, EiE program staff did not have a centralized program record keeping system internally and were using a variety of programs to keep track of interactions with students, and in line with policies and practices at the individual pilot sites. Evaluations such as this, which involve networks of community partnerships, need to consider the practicality of evaluation tools and how they can be embedded within existing processes and systems across organizations.
- At the program/systems level, co-creating a tool that SPSWs could use to track outgoing referrals, as well as program strengths, challenges, and equity stories was helpful to track EiE activities alongside overarching program objectives: to enhance equity in education for students from low-income neighborhoods in Ottawa. However, methods for sharing equity stories with schools and communities to better inform their practices need to be developed that maintain participant and program safety, while still allowing those stories to drive change towards a more equitable education system.

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