



ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF LEARNING:

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
FOR RACIALIZED UNDER-RESOURCED
COMMUNITIES

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PREPARED BY:

Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad, Sally
Abudiab, and Brice Baartman

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial influence on education delivery causing extensive disruptions that disproportionately affect racialized and low-income families (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; James, 2020; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; People for Education, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021). Ontario is in its second year of education disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related policy school closures which have negatively impacted students' educational experiences and resulted in significant learning loss. Many extracurricular programs offering much-needed support to vulnerable children, families, and communities have been forced to close or adapt to be offered remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions. Extracurricular programs provide students with opportunities to develop social and academic competencies. Importantly, these programs not only improve performance, but also improve student academics, motivation to attend school, and their future aspirations. Unaffordability in accessing quality programs remains a key barrier in racialized under-resourced communities driven largely by systemic inequities (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad, 2020; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021). This is where there is potential for synergetic collaborative partnerships between the public/non-profit and the private sector to work together to mitigate systemic barriers impeding student achievement at the community level. This will differ for each community, and by extension each postal code, as every neighbourhood has its own unique challenges driven by intersectionalities of systemic inequities such as the intersection of poverty and racism.

The report focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on learning loss and extracurricular programs, and explores how to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC), and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

This research project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Canada. With a focus on examining the impact of COVID-19 on learning loss and extracurricular programs, the research explored how community-based programming can be adapted and mobilized to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC), and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Specifically, the project as a case study examined an afternoon and weekend supplementary academic program called the Community School Initiative (CSI), which was offered from September 2020 to May 2021 to members of the Jane and Finch community in Toronto, Canada. The CSI is a partnership between the non-profit organization **Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education (YAAACE)** and for-profit enterprise **Spirit of Math**. It delivers a structured math curriculum to students in grades two to eight aged 8 to 14 years old supported by a team of caring adults including parents, coaches, and Ontario certified teachers. The efficacy and outcomes of the CSI was assessed through surveys with parents (n=33), students (n=33), and teachers (n=4), and a focus group with seven teachers delivering the curriculum in the CSI. Data was collected between June to July 2021 and responses were examined using thematic analysis as a methodology from a Critical Race Theory paradigm.

Findings were identified through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on the big picture understanding of the issue under study relative to the research question. Through multiple meetings, data was analyzed question by question to identify keywords that would become codes for analysis. From the list of keywords and codes, five interrelated themes were developed to represent the sample data set. The themes identified are *holistic and culturally relevant programming, structured programming, communication and parental engagement, digital divide and inequality, and effective pedagogies*.



Key Theme & Findings



- Holistic and Culturally Relevant Programming
- Structured Programming
- Communication and Parental Engagement
- Digital Divide and Inequality
- Effective Pedagogies

Overall, below are the findings from the study:

1. CSI supported the Jane-Finch community by addressing gaps caused by systemic barriers and circumstances created by COVID-19.
2. Reciprocal non-profit/community organizations and private enterprise partnerships with schools can increase access to social support programs and services reflecting the importance of school-community interface being aligned.
3. Achievement gap was minimized through mitigating the opportunity gap by focusing on accessibility and affordability.
4. A team of caring adults, including teachers, coaches, parents, & Spirit of Math staff working collaboratively optimized student achievement through identifying student and family needs and timely supports and interventions.
5. Trust, mentorship, and diverse representation that reflects cultural identities of students contributes to higher student engagement reflecting the importance of socio-culturally relevant and sustaining curriculum content and pedagogies.

As a collective, the findings indicate that the CSI effectively mobilized during the pandemic to minimize the achievement gap by creating access to academic opportunities that were affordable and socio-culturally relevant, sustaining, and responsive to systemic barriers impacting families living in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood.



Overall, a place-based community approach to delivering educational programs and services with a focus on minimizing the opportunity gap in partnership with non-profits, schools, community organizations, and private enterprises is recommended as a response to mitigating intensifying achievement gaps. This was particularly important for students who had access to caring adults during a difficult transition period created by pandemic restrictions. Below are a sample of quotes from the students:

"It allows me to continue to learn outside of my class. I feel I am better at math now and I learn something new every single week."

"It's has really helped me in school. I'm getting all As in math now and I'm more organized and I was never as confident at school before."

"I like that they are supportive and help with everything such as sports, school, and character."

One of the key characteristics that contributed to the success of program was providing mentorship and holistic programming from diverse educators and staff that reflect the cultural identities of students and families enrolled in the program. Another integral characteristic for successful implementation of the program was involvement of people who have established trust and rapport with the community and understood the local needs of the neighbourhood including the magnitude of systemic inequities influencing learning conditions.

These findings indicate that the CSI effectively mobilized in the midst of a pandemic to improve student learning experiences by providing a caring and supportive, yet engaging and challenging,

Key Themes & Findings (cont'd)

hybrid learning environment for students and families to learn. Ultimately, the affordability and the collaborative nature of the program were paramount in making it accessible and effective. While the negative impact of systemic inequities was intensified by COVID-19, the CSI mobilized in a short span of time to respond to these challenges by prioritizing access to academic programs in a way that was affordable and socio-culturally relevant and responsive. Although the CSI had its challenges, particularly around how to adapt the curriculum for lower achieving students as well as engaging and supporting students and parents more consistently in a remote context, findings are promising as it demonstrates the potential for reciprocal non-profit/community organizations and private enterprise partnerships in mitigating the opportunity gap outside

of school hours to help students actualize their full potential.

Overall, the benefits of the CSI aligns with the larger literature on the impact of COVID-19 in education which emphasizes supplemental educational programs offered by non-profits are significant in helping mitigate the impact of learning loss from the pandemic (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; James, 2020; Toronto Foundation, 2021). A place-based community approach to delivering educational programs and services with a focus on minimizing the opportunity gap in partnership with non-profits, schools, community organizations, and private enterprises is recommended as a response to widening achievement gaps perpetuated through neoliberal educational models that reinforce competition, tests scores, deficit thinking, and a one-size-fits-all approach to solving educational issues. Below are recommendations based on the findings:



1. Greater investments to facilitate access to opportunities and programs that are affordable and accessible to the community and the demographics of people who live in it are needed. This is where there is potential for collaborative partnerships between non-profits and the private sector.
2. Greater investments in holistic and culturally relevant and sustaining programming that rewards diverse identities and lived experiences are needed. As part of hiring, people who have established relationships and rapport with the community should be prioritized.
3. Provide multiple avenues and mediums to help parents navigate educational platforms and support their children remotely and at home with consideration for digital literacy. Suggestions include use of information letters, creation of how-to videos, and administrative support.
4. Develop and distribute an information package on curriculum and parental expectations with practical tools, examples, and resources to enhance family involvement in supporting student learning.
5. Consistent on-going support of teachers and their self-care through flexibility in pedagogy, assessments, and delivery of curriculum. Create opportunities for team teaching and hiring additional staff to support high-needs students and those with exceptionalities.

As part of knowledge mobilization and dissemination, a research blog has been created (communityschoolinitiative.com) to share resources and findings with the larger community. A culminating symposium with community leaders and various stakeholders was hosted in February to share the findings and engage in further discussions. You can also learn more about the findings by watching a recorded webinar from December 2021 hosted by Community-Based Research Canada: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_wsmA4rZqY&t=1629s

The Research Team

A dynamic team from various backgrounds and lived experiences mobilized to investigate how COVID-19-related education disruptions (e.g., shifts to remote learning, cancelling of in-person extracurricular activities, etc.) affected learning among racialized, low-income students in the Jane-Finch community. The project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The research process involved continuous consultations with YAAACE Founding Director Devon Jones, YAAACE and Spirit of Math staff, selected parents whose children were enrolled in the Community School Initiative, as well as student advisors who are from the Jane-Finch community. The project was largely carried out by two senior research assistants, Master of Social Work graduate student Sally Abudiab and Master of Education graduate student Brice Baartman, under the supervision of Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad who is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. There was also assistance from four Bachelor of Education students- Doris Trlin, Michael Baglio, Abbey Seehaver, and Olivia Buongiorno- who in the summer of 2021 assisted with development of the literature review and resource identification as part of their alternative practicum experience.



Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad Principal Investigator

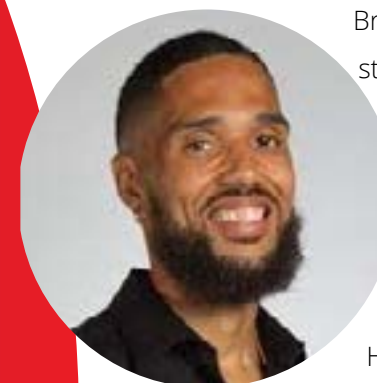
Ardavan Eizadirad (@DrEizadirad) is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. He is an educator with the Toronto District School Board, author of *Decolonizing Educational Assessment: Ontario Elementary Students and the EQAO* (2019), and co-editor of *Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2021 co-edited with Drs. Zuhra Abawi and Rachel Berman), *Counternarratives of Pain and Suffering as Critical Pedagogy: Disrupting Oppression in Educational Contexts* (forthcoming 2022 co-edited with Drs. Andrew Campbell & Steve Sider), and *International Handbook of Anti-Discriminatory Education* (forthcoming 2023 co-edited with Dr. Peter Trifonas). His research interests include equity, standardized testing, community engagement, anti-oppressive practices, critical pedagogy, social justice education, resistance, and decolonization. Dr. Eizadirad is also the founder and Director of **EDication Consulting** (www.edication.org) offering equity, diversity, and inclusion training to organizations.

Sally Abudiab



Sally Abudiab is a Palestinian Canadian with a Master of Science from the Rehabilitation Sciences Institute (2019) and a Bachelor of Science in Mental Health Studies from the University of Toronto (2016). She is near completion of her Master of Social Work at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Sally has experience working with organizations at various levels including non-profits such as the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation and Daughters for Life, and governmental agencies such as the Department of National Defence. Her research interests include disability studies, equity and social justice, health and wellbeing, and the experiences of athletes. During her spare time, Sally enjoys rollerblading, baking, and clearing the clutter.

Brice Baartman



Brice Baartman (@bricebaartman) is a Canadian/South African student in his 2nd year in the Master of Teaching program at the University of Toronto. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Ryerson/X University. He also has a College Certificate in Pre-Health Sciences from George Brown College. Brice has been working and volunteering with children and youth in under-resourced communities for over 10 years through the Community Healing Project, People's Elite Basketball, Stella's Place, the Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, Green Thumbs Growing Kids, the Toronto District School Board, and other organizations in the Greater Toronto Area. His research interests include financial literacy education, mental health, anti-discriminatory practices, asset-based community development (ABCD), and social justice education.

COVID-19 and Educational Disruptions

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges and presented new hardships for marginalized communities and families associated with loss of income, lack of access to social support services, increased care responsibilities, and greater likelihood of contracting COVID-19 (Choi et al., 2020; Eizadirad & Sider, 2020; Goodyear, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). The pandemic has significantly impacted the delivery of education with widespread disruptions in schools and communities, particularly disadvantaging racialized and low-income families who on a systemic level have fewer access to resources and support services (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; Eizadirad, 2019,2020; James, 2020; Toronto Foundation, 2021; United Way, 2019; Williams et al. 2013). As a result of school closures and abrupt transitions to remote learning, opportunity and achievement gaps are widening, largely because of systemic barriers preventing equitable access and engagement to online education (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; James, 2020; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; People for Education, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021).

The prolonged nature of COVID-19-related school lockdowns and community restrictions not only have impacted students' ability to attend schools but consequentially it has led to massive reductions in accessing co-curricular opportunities and supplemental education programs (SEPs) (Ekeh & Okeke, 2019; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021), with a 90% decline in sports offered in schools (People for Education, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021). A SEP can be described as "a combination of academic training with unconventional methods (e.g., sports, games, arts, discussions) in an organized program to

increase the number of positive academic outcomes among students relative to negative ones" (Ekeh & Okeke, 2019, p. 5). For marginalized students living in low-income racialized neighbourhoods, evidence has shown that SEPs act as complementary academic training that improves academic outcomes in student's mental health, well-being, and overall academic achievement (Ekeh & Okeke, 2019; National Alliance for Children and Youth, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021).

Since the start of the pandemic there has been increased demands for social services that far exceeds the capacity of organizations to meet such demands (Toronto Foundation, 2021).

This research project explored how community-based programming can be adapted and mobilized during the pandemic to mitigate opportunity and achievement gaps for Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC), and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This is timely and important as it provides Canadian race-based data to fill the gap in the literature about the impact of COVID-19 on achievement in racialized and under-resourced communities, given that early data examining the impact of the pandemic on learning shows that racialized, low-income neighbourhoods are further disadvantaged (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; Choi et al., 2020; James, 2020; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021).



What is the Community School Initiative (CSI)?

Community School Initiative (CSI) is a partnership between the non-profit organization Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education (YAAACE, 2021; learn more at <https://yaaace.com>) and for-profit enterprise Spirit of Math (Spirit of Math, 2021; learn more at <https://spiritofmath.com>). It delivered a structured math curriculum to students in grades two to eight aged 8 to 14 years old at a subsidized cost supported by a team of caring adults including parents, coaches, and teachers. CSI was offered as a 9-month (36 weeks) program beginning in September 2020 and ending in May 2021. It began with in-person programming, moved to remote delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions in alignment with public health guidelines, and transitioned to a hybrid model to support families and their circumstances. YAAACE students had access to the Spirit of Math curriculum with slight adjustments. The cost of the program was subsidized at \$100 per person, so families got access to it at the fraction of what it typically costs at \$3000 as a private sector support service for gifted and high achieving students.

YAAACE seeks to engage students and families in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood through socio-culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining year-round programming in academics, athletics, recreation, technology, and the arts (see Eizadirad, 2020 for a more in-depth history of YAAACE). Since its inception in 2007, YAAACE has created synergetic collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders to facilitate the growth of the organization to expand the programs and supplemental educational services it offers.

Some key partners include the Ministry of Education, Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Toronto Catholic District School Board, Laidlaw Foundation, Service Canada, Black Creek Community Health Centre, Sony Music, Michael "Pinball" Clemons Foundation, Public Safety Canada, and most recently Spirit of Math. These partnerships focus on addressing the systemic barriers and the external factors impacting the achievement of students in the community, particularly for racialized low-income students and families. This is significant given that many studies have shown that racialized students and others in non-dominant social categories in society are disadvantaged systemically due to inequities in schools affiliated with streaming, push-outs, lack of representation, and neoliberal policies and practices proclaiming neutrality and colourblindness (Ahmed, 2021; Au, 2016; Battiste, 2013; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad, 2019; Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021; Giroux, 2003; Hanna, 2019; James, 2020; Schlueter, 2021; Shah, 2018; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; United Way, 2019).

An initiative tasked with closing the achievement/opportunity gap by ensuring that our students are at or above the provincial standard

CSI seeks to work with the schools in the community, students/families in the community to provide academic support.

Racialized and low-income families have less access to resources and support services

What is the Community School Initiative (CSI)?

(Continued)

YAAACE uses a Social Inclusion Framework as an operational framework for implementation of its programs and services including the CSI.

YAAACE acknowledges that negative pull factors in the community such as exposure to violence, guns, and gangs driven by systemic inequities gravitate children and youth towards a lifestyle affiliated with risk-taking, poor decision-making, and false hopes. In response, the Social Inclusion strategy seeks to mitigate risk factors in the community by surrounding children and youth with access to quality programming to offset exposure to negative pull factors. The Social Inclusion team works with the various stakeholders to identify the most volatile cohort of students to ensure that they have access to academic support, recreational programming, expanded opportunities, comprehensive wraparound support, and cultural considerations of care and reflective services year-round. The idea is to ensure students have access to a caring adult, whether a teacher, coach, or mentor at all times in a 24-hour cycle, particularly outside of school hours on



Image 1. YAAACE's Social Inclusion Strategy and Operational Framework.

weekday evenings and weekends where there is the greater risk for exposure to violence.

The partnerships YAAACE has created and sustained with various stakeholders over the years such as with the Ministry of Education and the TDSB ensures that the cost to their programs and services are low so the opportunities remain accessible and affordable. The prevention and intervention strategies offered through YAAACE programs and services are based on trust and the larger goal of minimizing the opportunity gap to provide students and families living in Jane and Finch with viable alternatives to guns, gangs, and attrition.

CSI provides alternative academic support for BIPOC students who are achieving below the provincial standard in numeracy guided by the curriculum, resources, and pedagogies provided by Spirit of Math. Approximately 100 students participated in the CSI, including 5 staff from Spirit of Math, 8 Ontario certified teachers, 8 YAAACE coaches, and other staff hired by YAAACE to be part of the student support team. The support team would assist teachers in their classrooms with many of the staff having direct community connections with families in the program. BIPOC educators were hired to represent the cultural identities of the students and the families. YAAACE hires the same small group of educators to deliver its annual educational programs throughout the year, such as the March Break camp and the Summer Institute, to create continuity and establish trust with students and families. Coaches served as mentors as part of the delivery of the educational program working collaboratively with the teachers to keep students accountable, motivate them, and facilitate transfer of life skills from the classroom to sports and the larger community.

Key Partners:





Spirit of Math is a community of high-performers, disruptors, changemakers and the global standard of excellence in math education. At its core, Spirit of Math began in a small Toronto public school classroom in 1970s, where teacher Charles Ledger and his pupils set a new standard in math education. Spirit of Math continues to do so to this very day, taking students from the top of the class to the top of the world. As an organization setting only the highest standards for itself, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spirit of Math successfully converted over [800 in-person classes to teacher-led, online](#) classes within 2 weeks, featured as a [case study by Microsoft](#).

In September 2020, Spirit of Math launched its new [Global Virtual Online Classes Division](#).

OUR FOUNDERS | HOW IT ALL STARTED IN 1970s

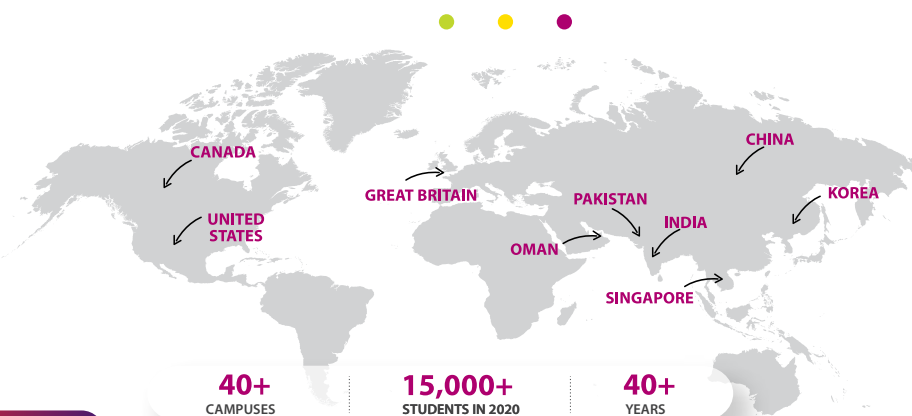
Kimberley Langen, née Ledger is the CEO of Spirit of Math. She taught elementary and high school students in public and private institutions and was the Director of Academics for a private girls' school. She is also a consultant for private and public-school divisions. She has a B.A. and a B.Sc. Hons., from Queen's University, and a B.Ed. from the University of Toronto. She created the curriculum and teacher training programs to form what is now the **Spirit of Math method**. Kim was an **EY Entrepreneur of the Award** finalist in 2014 and included in Chatelaine magazine's **W100 list of top female entrepreneurs** in 2015.

Charles Ledger earned an Honours B.Com. from the University of Manitoba, a B.Th. from the University of Toronto, an M.Ed. from Union Seminary, New York, and an M.A. from Columbia University. Charles developed the original Spirit of Math method for grades 7, 8, & 9 while working at a Canadian junior high school. He received the **Prime Minister's Award for Teaching**, a **Rene Descartes medal** from the **University of Waterloo** and the **Claude Watson Award** from the North York Board of Education for excellence in teaching ability.

Gwen Ledger earned a B.A. from York University and an M.A. from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Gwen taught from the young age of 16 and consulted for elementary teachers before retiring in 1993. Gwen **co-wrote the original Spirit of Math Program** for grades 1-4. Her love and understanding of children provided the **foundation** for many of the **teaching methods** used today in Spirit of Math classes.

INTEGRATED COMMUNITY WORK

Spirit of Math works to inspire parents and teachers, schools, school divisions, and partners **around the world** to cultivate the potential of today's youth to solve tomorrow's problems. Some of the notable collaborations around the world include but are not limited to: [Slumabad](#) in Pakistan; [Helping Hands](#) in Uganda; Teacher Training for [Allied Schools](#) in Pakistan, [Y.A.A.C.E](#) in Toronto and the Winnipeg School Division in Canada.



THE FOUR ELEMENTS

Core Curriculum, Drills, Collaborative Groupwork and Problem-Solving form the foundation of the Spirit of Math program. These elements create a multi-layered experience that creates well-rounded students who have an intensive toolkit of skills, logical problem solving and higher-level collaborative capabilities. Our students are therefore able to understand new ideas with ease, being agile in learning in any area of their lives.

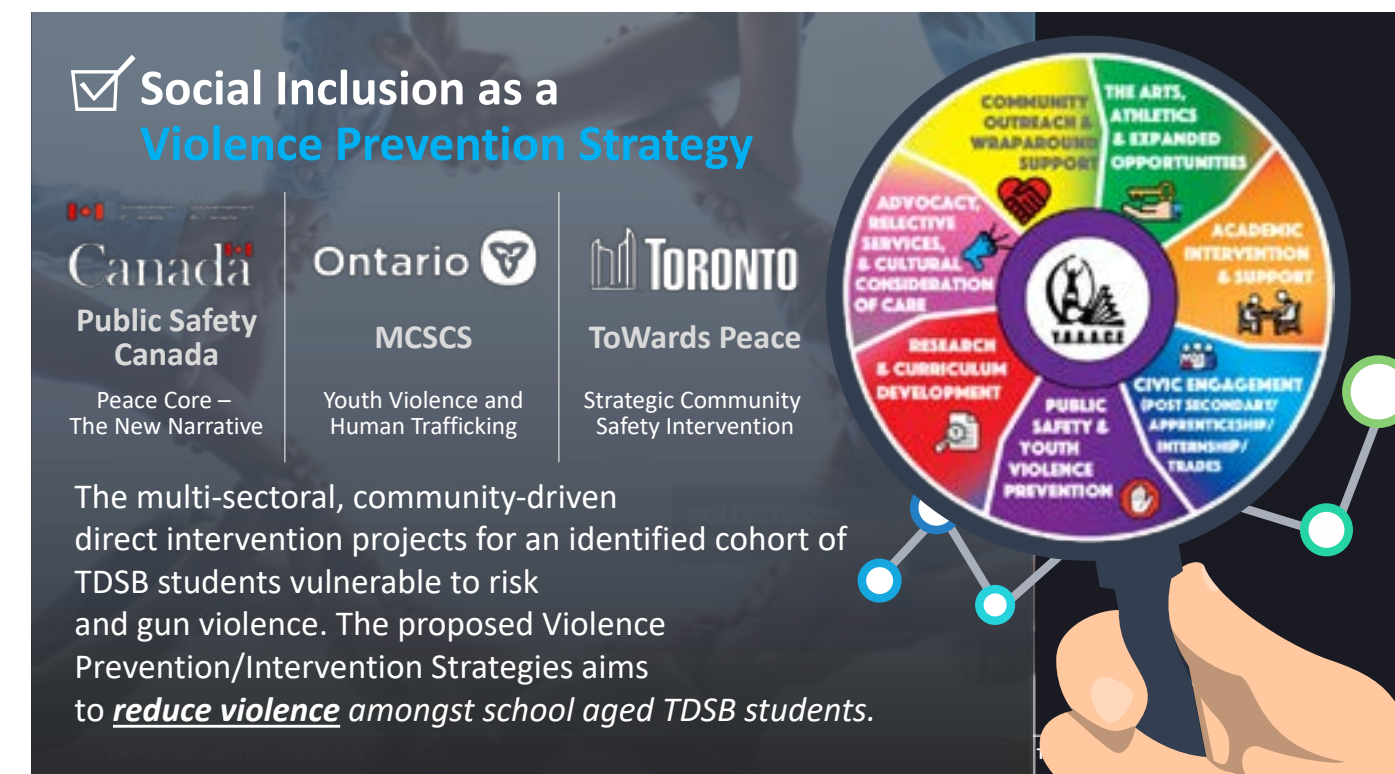


Y.A.A.A.C.E

YOUTH ASSOCIATION FOR ACADEMICS, ATHLETICS, AND CHARACTER EDUCATION



Founded in 2007, YAAACE is a community organization that seeks to engage children and youth from all communities – particularly those from marginalized and poor under-resourced communities through participation in year round comprehensive programming and activities (academics, athletics, recreation, technology and the arts). Y.A.A.C.E's mandate is twofold: to build capacity in all children and youth thus enhancing their capacity to become twenty first century learners and global citizens.



Y.A.A.C.E's social inclusion strategy is a socio-mechanism co-constructed by frontline workers, educators, researchers, academics, law enforcement personnel and stakeholders with a vested interest in children, youth and community.

The objective of the social inclusion strategy is to nurture and incubate the vast potential of children and youth becoming twenty first century learners and global citizens.

The program design pivots on the provision of comprehensive year round programming (academics, athletics, recreation, technology and the arts).

The operational framework is as follows:

- outreach and wraparound
- arts, athletics and expanded opportunities
- academic intervention and support (the Weekend Academy and Summer Institute);
- civic engagement
- public safety and youth violence prevention, research and curriculum development (specifically, the creation of a curriculum that targets reflective education and seeks to mitigate negative environmental factors that compromise academic engagement for students in racialized communities).
- Advocacy, reflective services, and cultural consideration of care.

Research Questions and the Theoretical Framework

Assess and identify

The research project was guided by three main objectives:

- 1 Assess the effectiveness of YAAACE's Community School Initiative program as it transitioned from in-person to remote delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions,
- 2 identify barriers preventing access and engagement in remote learning, and
- 3 identify effective remote instruction programming and pedagogies that can supplement delivery of education programs.

The research was guided by the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which has been banned in some cities in the United States in recent years. CRT provides a framework to examine how racism operates through policies and processes embedded within the social fabric of institutions proclaimed as “neutral” and “colourblind” from a neoliberal lens that glorifies meritocracy, individualism, and competition through a survival of the fittest mentality (Au, 2016; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018; Giroux, 2003; Lopez, 2003; Matias, 2016; Tett & Hamilton, 2021).

CRT further provides a framework to critically examine who is privileged and advantaged by the conditions of the norm and who is left out and disadvantaged (Ahmed, 2021; James, 2020; Gorski, 2018; Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021). This involves an examination beyond the individual realm to community factors impacting teaching and learning conditions. The narratives expressed by the participants in the CSI, who live in the Jane and Finch community, assisted in identifying systemic inequities in the community that serve as barriers to student achievement and impede their progress to achieve their full potential.

Distinction between the Achievement Gap and the Opportunity Gap

First, it is important to distinguish between what is referred to as the achievement gap and the opportunity gap.

In the education sector, the “achievement gap” often refers to “[D]isparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other [outcome-based] success measures” (Ansell, 2011, para. 1).

Reference to these outcome-based statistics, particularly differences in achievement between various social groups, are used by policymakers and other educational stakeholders to assess and judge the quality of education offered by schools, communities, regions, or countries. In response to these disparities, educational reforms are proposed to close the achievement gap such as greater investment in standardized testing as an accountability tool, which promotes and reinforces a neoliberal market driven model of education (Au,

2016; Eizadirad, 2019; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018; Kempf, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). For our purposes, we refer to the achievement gap as the difference in achievement outcomes between identities and communities in dominant positions of society compared to those minoritized along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, and other factors. The emphasis is on outcome-based results, yet as Carter and Welner (2013) emphasize, “While these assessments [and by extension achievement gaps] attempt to determine where students are, they ignore how they may have gotten there” (p. 3).

In contrast, the “educational opportunity gap” as defined by Gorski (2018) is “the troubling ways youth experiencing poverty are denied the educational opportunities more likely granted to more affluent youth” (p. 101). This is process-oriented rather than outcome-based.

For our purposes, we expand on Gorski’s (2018) definition of the opportunity gap in alignment with the works of Shah (2018), Schlueter (2021), Carter and Welner (2013), and Williams et al. (2013) to include all minoritized identities experiencing systemic inequities.

We define the “opportunity gap” as the differences in systemic inequities that create barriers for minoritized identities and communities to access and secure opportunities to achieve to their full potential. Similar to the achievement gap, the opportunity gap can be compared by individuals, schools, neighbourhoods, regions, or countries.

Our analysis prioritizes a neighbourhood level analysis focusing on the Jane and Finch community. Gorski (2018) outlines various “dimensions of the educational opportunity gap” (p. 103) which are helpful when discussing disparities in opportunities amongst schools in different neighbourhoods. Some factors to consider are school funding, availability of resources, student to teacher ratio, opportunities for family involvement, and technologies available. Whereas the achievement gap examines outcomes on tests as the barometer for assessing the magnitude of inequities in education, the opportunity gap provides a more holistic community lens going beyond the individual realm to explore the systemic inequities that serve as barriers impacting student achievement in schools across different social groups. This community lens approach is important given that “educational disparities and intergenerational economic inequality are highly correlated with skin colour, ethnicity, linguistic and social class status” (Carter & Welner, 2013, p. 1)



The Jane and Finch Community and the Opportunity Gap

YAAACE operates out of different schools in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. Toronto's northwest cluster of neighbourhoods, which includes Jane and Finch, have experienced higher rates of COVID-19 in comparison to other neighbourhoods in Toronto (Choi et al. 2020; Goodyear, 2021; see Eizadirad, 2017 for an in-depth history of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood).

Jane and Finch also accommodates more youth, single-parent families, refugees, individuals without a secondary-school diploma, low-income households, and public housing tenants than any other neighbourhood in Toronto (Ahmadi, 2018; Williams et al., 2013).

The Learning Opportunity Index (LOI) created by the TDSB, which is one of the largest school boards in North America, ranks schools based on external community challenges affecting student achievement (Toronto District School Board, 2020). Two lists are created, one ranking all elementary schools in the board and the other all secondary schools. The school rankings are updated every three years. The LOI was created to acknowledge that learning outcomes differ by communities where schools are located, and to ensure schools facing greater external challenges impacting student achievement receive more support and resources.

Many schools in the Jane-Finch community are ranked high on the LOI (needing more resources relative to student and community needs) and low on the Fraser Institute's school rankings (poor performance on provincial standardized tests).

The LOI school rankings are calculated based on six variables which include:

- 1** median family income,
- 2** percentage of families whose income is below the low-income measure (before tax),
- 3** percentage of families receiving social assistance,
- 4** adults with low education,
- 5** adults with university degrees, and
- 6** single-parent families.

Another popular tool that ranks schools on a different measure is the Fraser Institute (Fraser Institute, 2021; <https://www.compareschoolrankings.org/>). It ranks schools using publicly available data on achievement based on performance on standardized tests. Many schools, both elementary and secondary, in the Jane-Finch community are ranked high on the LOI (needing more resources relative to student and community needs) and low on the Fraser Institute's school rankings (poor performance on provincial standardized tests). The Fraser Institute school rankings have gained so much currency in the public realm that it impacts prices of homes around schools given their respective ranking (Eizadirad, 2019). The rankings contribute to schools located in racialized communities being labelled as "bad", where the assumption is made that they do not offer quality education. Furthermore, the rankings do not consider how the opportunity gap may impact achievement across different neighbourhoods. The deficit thinking about "low-achieving" schools in racialized neighbourhoods is further perpetuated through the media where the social problems impacting the community are often blamed on the residents via neoliberal discourses affiliated with meritocracy and colourblindness without much discussion about systemic inequities functioning as barriers for student achievement (Au, 2018; Ahmadi, 2018; Eizadirad, 2017; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018; Friesen, 2018; Giroux, 2003; James, 2012; Shah, 2018).



Data Collection and Analysis

Ethics approval was granted by the university's Research Ethics Board. Regular monthly meetings were hosted on Zoom with YAAACE and Spirit of Math staff along with 2 youth and parent advisors selected by YAAACE to be part of the decision-making committee. Once the research team outlined the survey and focus group questions, it was presented to the decision-making committee for feedback.

Based on their feedback, some questions were removed or revised, and some new questions added. The surveys were completed anonymously and included a combination of open ended and Likert scale questions. On average surveys took approximately 20 minutes to be completed. Surveys were administered online via Qualtrics, a secure data collection website.

Questions captured demographical data about participants and information about their experiences in the CSI in different roles as students, parents, or teachers. Participants were recruited via a master-list that YAAACE used to communicate with parents, students, and teachers. 33 students, 33 parents, and 4 teachers completed the surveys. A 90-minute focus group was also conducted with all seven teachers delivering the curriculum in the CSI. A \$30 Amazon gift card was provided to those who participated in the focus group and completed the surveys as a token of appreciation for their time.

All data was collected between June to July 2021 upon completion of the CSI program. Responses

were examined using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a paradigm and thematic analysis as a methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Green et al. 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Findings were identified through thematic analysis by all three authors. Clarke and Braun (2017) operationalize thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (p. 297). Thematic analysis focuses on the big picture understanding of the issue under study relative to the research question. By examining participants' responses from various perspectives- students, parents, and teachers- barriers to learning during the pandemic were identified, particularly for BIPOC and families living in under-resourced neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch. The analysis tools in Qualtrics software were used to pool survey responses for each question. Then through multiple meetings, analysis was done where responses for each question were examined to identify keywords that would become codes for further analysis. From the list of keywords and codes, five interrelated themes were developed to represent the data. The themes identified include holistic and culturally relevant programming, structured programming, communication and parental engagement, digital divide and inequality, and effective pedagogies.

Demographics

Majority of the survey respondents self-identified as racialized expressing being Black and African Caribbean with some representation from Philippines, Somalia, and being mixed-race.

Over 45% (n=15) of the parents who responded to the survey were single-parent households making less than \$50,000 annually as a family.

58% (n=17) of respondents indicated renting or living in subsidized housing. Common responses for the highest level of education completed were a college diploma (51%) followed by an undergraduate degree (21%).

All seven educators teaching in the CSI were racialized with a range of 2 to 15 years in experience being involved with delivery of YAAACE programs and services.

Key Theme & Finding #1: Holistic and Culturally Relevant Programming

Parents, students, and teachers as a collective consistently expressed that they felt the CSI gave students who were struggling in the school system an opportunity to improve socially, emotionally, and academically. Parents expressed that they felt the learning environment was inclusive and welcoming by being "family-centred" similar to a community hub. As one parent explained it, "YAAACE offers programs that not only enriches the community but the families living within it." On average on a scale of 1 to 10, parents ranked the effectiveness of the CSI in promoting life skills at 8.5. As one student expressed, "I like that they are supportive and help me with everything related to sports, school and character."

Key aspects of the CSI identified as helpful by parents and students via survey responses included having the support of coaches, extra tutoring and academic support during the week remotely, access to technologies such as iPads and smartboards, and teachers that reflected the cultural identities of students who made the learning "fun and engaging". As one parent expressed, "YAAACE supports in the development of creating lasting relationships while building social skills and demonstrating the importance of respect. The public school system often does not provide this, especially in lower income and predominantly Black communities." Other parents' comments echoed the importance of teachers and coaches serving as role models "reflecting the cultural backgrounds of the students." As another parent stated, "Very good program for inner city kids, especially Black boys."

Majority of the parents and students expressed having increased confidence in numeracy skills by the end of the program. As one parent expressed, "I love the way this organization pushes the importance of education and basketball." Students ranked their math confidence at 7.16 prior to the start of the CSI whereas by



Key Theme & Finding #2: Structured Programming

end of the program their confidence had increased to 8.65. As one student explained it, “It has really helped me in school. I’m getting all A’s in math now and I’m more organized and I was never as confident at school before.” The rapport with the teachers was also outlined by students as being instrumental in increasing their engagement. As noted by one student, “I like my teacher because he allows me to finish my work and catch up always before moving on, so I’m not lost”. Overall, on a scale of 1 to 10, parents ranked the CSI at 8.6 in response to how likely they would enrol their child in the program again. Reasoning for their ranking outlined factors such as continuous access to a teacher or coach, increased confidence in numeracy due to exposure to experiential learning opportunities, differentiated instruction by teachers, and structured step-by-step curriculum provided by Spirit of Math. As one parents explained, “I like how it’s not just basketball and there is actually an education system attached to it.”

Take Away:

Given the positive benefits associated with holistic and culturally relevant programming, opportunities for structured programming must be affordable and accessible so to minimize and eliminate the barriers that exist in the community for accessing such programs. Further, the success of cross-sectoral private and public partnerships here indicates a potential for future similar community initiatives.

Recommendation:

Greater investments to facilitate access to opportunities and programs that are affordable and accessible to the community and the demographics of people who live in it reflecting the potential for collaborative partnerships between non-profits and the private sector.

“[YAAACE] supports in the development of creating lasting relationships while building social skills and demonstrating the importance of respect... The public school system often does not provide this, especially in lower income/predominantly Black communities.” Parent

“I like that they are supportive and help with everything (sports, school and character).” Student

The CSI provided a structured math curriculum to all participants in the program. Each student was placed in a grade based on diagnostic assessments and provided an individualized binder to keep track of their progress. As one teacher expressed, “It’s nice to have the lessons beforehand, step by step, structured, detailed with different manuals and books, drills set up, and problem of day and the week provided”. This allowed teachers to spend less time preparing lessons and more time supporting students. Teachers also expressed that the consistency in the structure of the program helped identify struggling students who needed additional supports. Parents echoed similar sentiments about the structure and consistency in the curriculum being a positive aspect of the program. One parent stated, “Accountability, responsibility, ownership, pride, confidence all developed from program consistency”. Teachers further expanded that the technologies and resources made available to the students as part of the program was very helpful such as the use of “iPads, AppleTV, laptops, and applications such as Brightspace, Microsoft Teams, and ActiveInspire.” These were resources that many of the students may not have had access to or be able to afford if it was not for the subsidized cost of the program. Recognizing that similar programs exist but at a much higher price, one parents expressed gratitude stating, “Programs outside of YAAACE do not fit the budget.”

Take Away:

Students reported improved confidence and attitudes towards mathematics and STEM through the structured math program and the extra supports available.

Recommendation:

Invest in holistic and culturally relevant and sustaining programming that rewards diverse identities and lived experiences; prioritize relationships and have people with trusted connections to the community involved (e.g., BIPOC teachers and coaches working together with students and families).

“YAAACE offers programs not only enrich the community but the families living within it.” Parent

“It’s really helped me in school I’m getting all A’s in math now and I’m more organized and I was never as confident at school before.” Student

“Classes are too big for students who need more individual attention.” Parent

Key Theme & Finding #3: Communication and Parental Engagement

In schools, increased parental engagement has been shown to improve student educational achievement, learning, and social skills and behaviour (Auerbach, 2007; Hill et al., 2004; Sheridan et al., 2011; Fenton et al., 2017). Parent involvement is believed to be associated with positive student outcomes through two potential mechanisms: (1) the student's perception of cognitive competence and (2) the quality of the student-teacher relationship. As for the CSI, an interesting discrepancy on the levels of engagement between parents and teachers was found: whereas parents felt they were consistently available for communication purposes, teachers felt their communication was sporadic and inconsistent. Communication style and frequency differed depending on the medium for communication, all of which were accessible.

Teacher's biggest concern with online learning was the difficulty in gauging student engagement and providing them with timely feedback. This was attributed to challenges in collecting student work, the negative impact of online learning for kinaesthetic learners, and lower attendance. Teachers observed that shy and introvert students were less engaged during online learning.

It appeared that they did not want to ask questions in front of their peers due to "fear of being seen as stupid or incompetent." As one teacher explained, "During in person classes, you can read and assess body language and emotions better which would allow me to provide students with more timely support and feedback. This was much more difficult online, especially when cameras were turned off." Another barrier to learning that was identified was the lack of familiarity to navigate online teaching and learning platforms. When the program shifted to remote delivery, some parents and students had difficulties navigating the online platform to submit assignments and complete their work on time. It was not that the work was not done, but the lack of digital literacy to navigate the platform. Once this was identified through feedback collected by teachers as follow-up for missed work, "how to" and "step-by-step" videos were created and posted to help students and parents navigate the learning platform to submit their work and receive timely feedback. The time dedicated to identifying the problem and troubleshooting it slowed down the pace of the curriculum and created lag time between when students submitted their work and received feedback on it.



"Not a frequent user of some of the virtual platforms."
Parent

"There's not a lot of parental engagement involvement at the older grades simply because the curriculum is a little bit difficult." Teacher

Take Away:

Parental engagement is a key component of helping students develop holistically and create continuity in their learning both at home and while attending program.

Recommendation:

Given the importance of consistent and meaningful parental engagement, it is important to provide multiple avenues and mediums to help parents navigate educational platforms and support their children remotely and at home with consideration for digital literacy (e.g., information letters, how-to videos, and administrative support).

Key Theme & Finding #4: Digital Divide and Inequality

The accelerated shift to online learning has increased reliance on the use of information communication technologies (ICTs) in education, and exposed the growing digital divide experienced by families and schools (Bonal & González, 2020; Bailey et al., 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021). In a report titled *Mapping Toronto's Digital Divide* (Andrey et al., 2021) evidence showed that “noteworthy parts of the City with lower rates of connectivity include the Humber Summit/Jane and Finch area” (p. 4), and this was reflected in the YAAACE parent surveys with some parents stating that they didn't have adequate access to technologies and internet.

A majority of parents (63%) and students (72%) expressed in-person learning better supports their needs. Out of 29 student responses, 0% said they prefer online learning, about 72% (n=23) preferred in-person school, and 18.75% (n=6) said they prefer a hybrid model. In comparison, out of 32 parent responses, 0% selected online learning as best supporting their child's needs, 62.5% (n=20) selected in person, and 31.25% (n=10) preferred a hybrid model. Students' reasons for their dislike of online learning were highlighted in quotes like “It's boring and I can't get one on one help,” “It's easily distracting,” and “I miss being with my friends.” Many parents were also critical of remote learning with some stating “Remote learning is not an ideal model for a child with ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder],” and “It's not as effective nor motivating as in-person learning.” However, it is important to note that some students and parents did enjoy aspects of online learning. One student expressed that “It made me like online learning.” Also, one of the parents expressed that online learning was good for developing digital competencies because “It's important for the boys to be familiar with different styles of learning and to be proficient with the technologies involved.”

Teachers and parents both expressed that supporting students was more challenging remotely. Some of the challenges were due to students and parents not having adequate access to internet or personal devices such as the case with families with multiple children. Some parents also did not have adequate home space to support their children with one parent stating, “Suitable environment without distractions is hard to identify at home”. These challenges reflect the opportunity gap where systemic inequities create



barriers that impede optimal student achievement. Many studies have found that students from higher-income and White families are more likely to mitigate these issues by being able to afford digital devices, adequate internet, tutors, and extracurricular supplemental educational programs that will have positive effects on their academic and social development (Bailey et al., 2021; Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; Ekeh & Okeke, 2019; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; James, 2020; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021).

Teachers stated that teaching remotely made student engagement, their ability to support students one-on-one, and the collection of student work more difficult. When families, communities, and schools are unable to provide students with the devices and internet capabilities that are needed to ensure equitable access for remote engagement for learning, more students will be at risk of falling further behind in key areas such as reading, writing, math, and social-emotional learning skills (Toronto Foundation, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021).

Take Away:

Digital literacy and lack of access to technology can be a key barrier to learning. Consideration for conditions of learning at home and access to technology are paramount in supporting students

Recommendation:

Develop and distribute an information package on curriculum and parental expectations with practical tools, examples, and resources to enhance family involvement in supporting student learning.

“Suitable environment without distractions is hard to identify at home.” Parent

“If I was able to attend in person I don't get distracted with my surroundings at home.” Student

“The online aspect of teaching is very challenging as students can often have low bandwidths making it difficult for them to participate.” Teacher



Key Theme & Finding #5: Effective Pedagogies

Teachers felt the presence of coaches, due to their trust and mentorship, increased student engagement and accountability in virtual platforms. The effectiveness of coaches being involved was ranked very high at 9.33 by the parents. In the focus group teachers also spoke very highly of the impact of coaches on the learning environment with in-person and remote contexts contributing to increased student engagement and accountability. As one teacher explained, “It was night and day in terms of the difference in terms of behavior when the coaches got involved.” Similarly, parents shared immense praise for the presence of the coaches by describing the great respect that their children had for them and the mentorship they provided in and out of the classroom. As a collective, the continuous access to teachers and coaches and their direct on-going communication and collaboration helped increase student engagement. For example, student cameras were turned on more consistently for online classes and tasks were completed more on time due to the trusted rapport and the high expectations set.

Differences in marking student work was an area identified with conflicting expectations between YAAACE teachers and Spirit of Math instructors. As part of the Spirit of Math expectations, students either get the

question right or wrong without partial marks given. Teachers expressed frustrations about not being able to give partial marks or more time to students to complete certain tasks. They felt getting it all right or wrong did not align with best practices and may contribute to reducing students’ confidence in trying to master the content.

Teachers felt that the Spirit of Math pedagogy needed more adaptations, flexibility, and scaffolding to meet the needs of YAAACE students. They attributed this to the typical curriculum and pace of the Spirit of Math programs being tailored towards gifted, high-achieving students where this was not the case for majority of YAAACE students enrolled in the CSI. Overall, teachers felt the benefits of the program by far outweighed some of the processes that could have been improved.

Clarifying these expectations and further adapting the Spirit of Math curriculum, expectations, and assessment procedures to meet the needs of lower achieving students is an area that needs further exploration to improve the effectiveness of the CSI.

“Remembering my goal to becoming an NBA player. I won’t make it without good grades.”

Student

“The coaches helped huge in that aspect and getting them there and to help us monitor whose cameras are on/off.” Teacher

“The academic portion is just as (if not more) important for obvious reasons. It reinforces that they are more than just athletes and regular public school students. It teaches them that they are able to accomplish difficult things if they try hard. And it shows them that they are valued which encourages them to try harder.” Parent

Take Away:

There have been many studies of the benefits of high-quality remote instruction, and many reports of students preferring a blended learning model opposed to strictly face-to-face. Teaching students to be learners in a digital age using online learning tools can provide students with more flexibility and self-paced learning opportunities. The coaches being involved with the delivery of the educational component was seen as integral component for the success of the CSI.

Recommendation:

On-going support of teachers and coaches and their self-care through flexibility in pedagogy, assessments, and delivery of curriculum is essential. Create opportunities for team teaching and hiring additional staff to support high-needs students and students with exceptionalities.

Key Findings

- 1 CSI supported the Jane-Finch community by addressing gaps caused by systemic barriers and circumstances created by COVID-19.
- 2 Reciprocal non-profit/community organizations and private enterprise partnerships with schools can increase access to social support programs and services reflecting the importance of school-community interface being aligned.
- 3 Achievement gap was minimized through mitigating the opportunity gap by focusing on accessibility and affordability.
- 4 A team of caring adults, including teachers, coaches, parents, and Spirit of Math staff working collaboratively optimized student achievement through identifying student/family needs and timely supports and interventions.
- 5 Trust, mentorship, and diverse representation that reflects cultural identities of students contributes to higher student engagement reflecting the importance of socio-culturally relevant and sustaining curriculum and pedagogies.

Final Remarks and Next Steps

Education policymakers should be aware that racial and immigrant disparities exist in teacher-parent contact and in virtual and in-person learning. Perceptions based on deficit thinking by teachers affects important aspects of students' learning experience and achievement. Training should make educators and staff aware of these perceptions to avoid discriminatory racial stereotypes. Further, certain barriers, such as lack of English proficiency and costs associated with after-school programming must be addressed at a systematic level as these create unnecessarily obstacles to communicating with parents ultimately contributing to national disparities in subject-specific achievement and education trajectories. With such reformed education policies combined with appropriate teacher training, students have a better chance for academic success. As the disruptions created by COVID-19 are relatively new, more research is needed to identify and mitigate the challenges racialized and low-income communities experience as part of accessing community programs in inner-city neighbourhoods. This project ultimately shows that cross-sectorial partnerships can be meaningful and have immediate effect on the academic achievement for students in the Jane-Finch community.

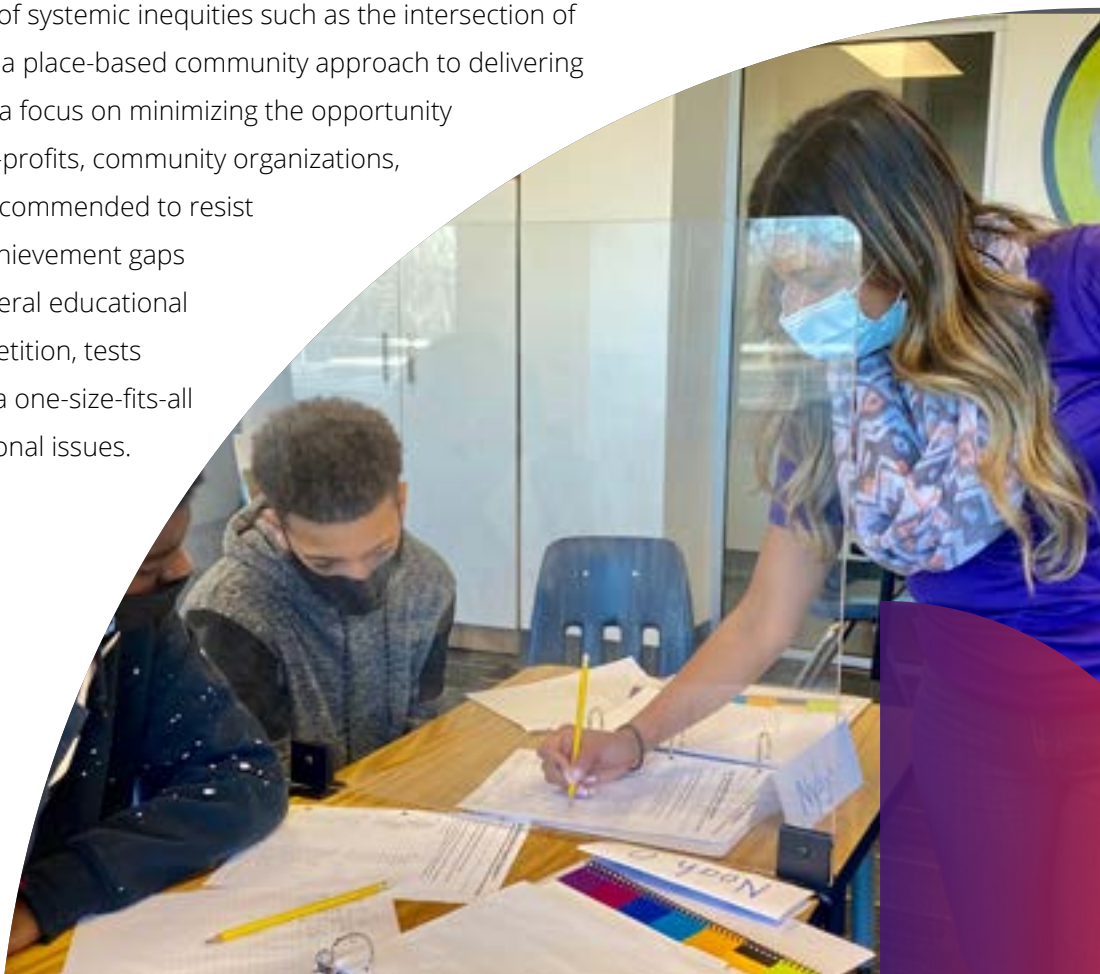
Findings indicate that community partnerships such as the CSI effectively mobilized in the midst of a pandemic to close the achievement gap by mitigating systemic inequities in the Jane and Finch community that created barriers for student achievement rooted in inequality of opportunity. While the negative impact of systemic inequities was intensified by COVID-19, the CSI mobilized in a short span of time to identify and respond to these challenges by prioritizing access to academic programs in a way that was affordable and socio-culturally relevant, sustaining, and responsive to the needs of families from the Jane and Finch community. Although the CSI had its challenges, particularly around how to adapt the curriculum for lower achieving students as well as engaging and supporting students more consistently in a remote context, findings are promising as it demonstrates the potential for reciprocal non-profit/community organizations and private enterprise partnerships to mitigate the opportunity gap outside of school hours to help students achieve to their full potential.

CSI serves as an example of how the achievement gap can be minimized by focusing on mitigating the opportunity gap involving a team of caring adults working collaboratively to enhance access to support systems and provide timely academic prevention and intervention strategies to optimize student achievement. One of the key characteristics that contributed to the success of the CSI that will be integral to implementation of other afterschool and weekend community programs in racialized and under-resourced communities is providing mentorship and holistic programming from diverse educators and staff that reflect the cultural identities of students and families enrolled in the program. Furthermore, offering programs

Final Remarks and Next Steps (Cont'd)

through people who have established trust and rapport with the community and understand the local needs of the neighborhood including the magnitude of systemic inequities influencing the learning conditions would enhance the effectiveness of the program.

Overall, findings from the benefits of CSI align with the larger literature on the impact of COVID-19 in education which emphasize that supplemental educational programs offered by non-profits are significant in helping mitigate the impact of learning loss from the pandemic. The CSI effectively mobilized to mitigate the opportunity gap by improving access to academic programs using a family-centred approach that was socio-culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of families from the Jane and Finch community. Specifically, the CSI remained accessible by ensuring it was affordable at a subsidized cost. Unaffordability in accessing quality programs remains a key learning barrier in racialized under-resourced communities driven by systemic inequities (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad, 2020). This is where there is potential for synergetic collaborative partnerships between the public/non-profit and the private sector to work together to mitigate systemic barriers impeding student achievement at the community level. This will differ for each community, and by extension each postal code, as every neighborhood has its own unique challenges driven by intersectionalities of systemic inequities such as the intersection of poverty and racism. Overall, a place-based community approach to delivering programs and services with a focus on minimizing the opportunity gap in partnership with non-profits, community organizations, and private enterprises is recommended to resist and respond to widening achievement gaps perpetuated through neoliberal educational models that reinforce competition, tests scores, deficit thinking, and a one-size-fits-all approach to solving educational issues.



Recommendations

- 1 Greater investments to facilitate access to opportunities and programs that are affordable and accessible to the community and the demographics of people who live in it are needed. This is where there is potential for collaborative partnerships between non-profits and the private sector.
- 2 Greater investments in holistic and culturally relevant and sustaining programming that rewards diverse identities and lived experiences are needed. As part of hiring, people who have established relationships and rapport with the community should be prioritized.
- 3 Provide multiple avenues and mediums to help parents navigate educational platforms and support their children remotely and at home with consideration for digital literacy. Suggestions include use of information letters, creation of how-to videos, and administrative support.
- 4 Develop and distribute an information package on curriculum and parental expectations with practical tools, examples, and resources to enhance family involvement in supporting student learning.
- 5 Consistent on-going support of teachers and their self-care through flexibility in pedagogy, assessments, and delivery of curriculum. Create opportunities for team teaching and hiring additional staff to support high-needs students and those with exceptionalities.

As part of knowledge mobilization and dissemination, a research blog has been created (communityschoolinitiative.com) to share resources and findings with the larger community. A culminating symposium with community leaders and various stakeholders was hosted in February to share the findings and engage in further discussions. You can also learn more about the findings by watching a recorded webinar from December 2021 hosted by Community-Based Research Canada: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_wsmA4rZqY&t=1629s.

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Contact Info

☎ 416.567.7994

✉ info@yaaace.com

📍 45 Norfinch Dr.,
North York, ON.