

OPPORTUNITY FUNDING

FOR HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS IN NEED



**FIVE YEAR
TRACKING OF
DISCRETIONARY
FUNDING FOR
HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS**



Measuredoutcome

Bridging the information gap in the non-profit sector



TFSS Beyond 3:30 Program



BACKGROUND

In Canada approximately one in seven children under the age of 18 lives in poverty.¹ Within the public education system, these students face many obstacles to success. Teachers are in a unique position to see and understand the first warning signs of a youth struggling with effects of poverty. Lower academic achievement, hunger and health issues, and difficulties at home often lead young people into negative and sometimes self-destructive situations. Most importantly, for lack of field trip fees, running shoes, or new glasses, they may not be exposed to opportunities that will help guide them in life.

Schools have systems in place to help these students, including principals, vice-principals, guidance counsellors, social workers, and others who perform important support functions, as well as grant programs. However, resources are limited and wait times for appointments and funding approval can result in a bad situation becoming even worse.

What if educators had greater discretion to do more to help students in need? Given modest resources and a degree of flexibility, is it possible to make a difference with a small act of kindness? This could be as simple as the timely gift of eyeglasses, assisting with the cost of a school trip, or food for a youth who is consistently coming to school hungry.

In 1998, a private donor established a fund that targets schools across Canada that serve higher-needs populations.

The Student Opportunity Fund is a program that offers a small annual grant, averaging \$2,000, given to each of 40 schools annually. The grants are provided to school principals with the direction that funds will be used to address the immediate and emergency needs of high-needs students at the school.²

Measuredoutcome.org was asked to review this program with a particular focus on the following questions:

- Are funds being utilized efficiently by teachers and school administrators to benefit young people in need?
- Can any pattern in use of funds be identified among this group of autonomous and geographically diverse schools?
- Can any improvements be made to the management of this program?

¹ Dominique Fleury, "Low-income Children," Perspectives 75-001-X (2008), <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2008105/pdf/10578-eng.pdf>; "Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada," Family Services Toronto (2013), <http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/2013C2000NATIONALREPORTCARDNOV26.pdf>.

² The only other limitation given to administrators was that no more than 20% of the grant was to be used for student fees.

METHODOLOGY

1. Archival Data on Fund Use

Measuredoutcome.org consolidated reporting from schools on five years of program expenditures and 16 categories of use including food, transportation, clothing, and supplies. This data was used to identify priorities and track any trends in use.

2. Principal & Administrator Survey

Survey feedback was gathered from the key contacts for program delivery from each school, including principals, teachers, and counsellors. Information on fund use, as well as developing school needs, was collected, along with feedback on the overall fund management processes. Participation in the survey was voluntary. 85% of funded schools contributed to the survey.

3. Case Studies

Several schools have developed innovative programs designed to support students and serve the community. A selection of case studies provides examples of successful programs.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Schools involved in this program were located in four large cities and five smaller communities within three provinces in Canada. Funding priority was given to schools that serve higher-needs neighbourhoods.³ All schools were publicly funded, with 34 in the public system and seven in the Catholic board system.

Three schools in the group operate alternative education programs. These include two schools that work with young mothers and one school that provides specialized individual learning programs.

Schools ranged in size from 25 students to over 1,600 students, with an average of 900 students per school. Depending on the size of the school, level of need, and use of funds in the previous year, schools were provided with a grant of between \$500 and \$4,500 per year.

To encourage thoughtful use of funds, schools were allowed to carry forward any unused portion of the grant to the following year with no penalty. In this way, schools were not obliged to use up funds at year-end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the schools and program leaders who took part in these programs and contributed to this report.

Written by Measuredoutcome.org,
August 2014.



³ Schools in this study serve communities where the median family income falls into the lower to middle income range (\$50,000-\$70,000).

RESULTS

Since its inception in 1998, principals have used the Student Opportunity Fund to support a wide range of needs within 16 categories of spending. In recent years, administrators have recorded approximately 250 transactions annually, between \$5 and \$3,000. Some schools have carried forward a balance of between 3% and 40% of funding each year.

Total Spending by Category 2010-2014



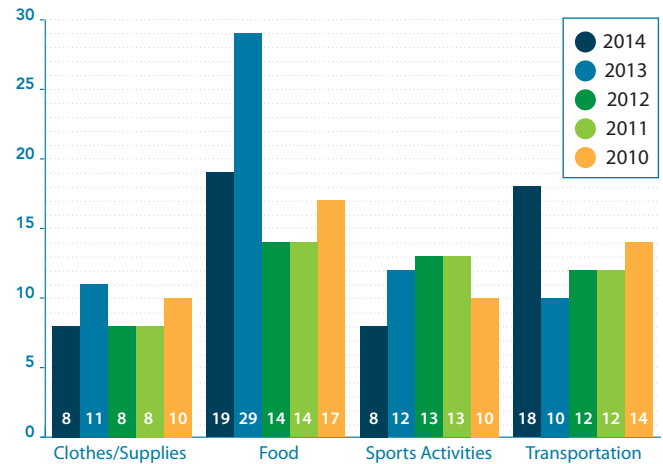
- 2% Music
- 2% Special Equipment
- 2% Sports Equipment
- 9% Clothes/Supplies
- 19% Food
- 11% Sports Activities
- 6% Field Trips
- 2% Literacy/Books
- 6% Student Fees
- 13% Transportation
- 1% Medical
- 0.4% Shelter
- 3% Art/Drama
- 5% Graduation Expenses
- 4% Student Conference
- 3% Other
- 12% Carryover

Cumulative total over five years, by percentage.

Results collected over the five-year sample show that school administrators directed funds primarily to four categories: food, transportation, sports activities, and clothes/supplies. There are other categories, such as graduation expenses, student fees, and field trips that are notable and varied between the schools. In many cases these expenses, such as sitting fees for graduation photos, had great impact on an individual level. However, for the purpose of the study, we will focus mainly on the four highest-use categories.^{4, 5}

Averaged over the past five years, allocation of the total budget in the top four funding categories are as follows: food (18.6%), transportation (13.2%), sports activities (11%) and clothes/supplies (8.8%).

Spending Comparison in Top Four Categories 2010-2014



Percentage of total budget per category averaged over five years.

Although fairly stable overall, there are two trends of note:

1. Transportation – After remaining stable for four years, use of funds for transportation increased by 40% in 2014. It is possible that this is due to the unusually harsh winter and the difficulty students had getting to and from school.
2. Food – Use of funding for food has increased consistently over the course of this study jumping by 115% in 2013. This is likely due to two factors. First, the introduction of a new school to the program that chose to invest primarily in nutrition. Second, new principals at two other schools chose to invest heavily in nutrition programs during that year. The subsequent decline in 2014 corresponds to the increase in transportation spending in that year.

⁴ The complete list of spending categories for the grants is as follows: art/drama, clothes/supplies, field trips, food, grad expenses, literacy/books, medical, music, shelter, special equipment, sports activities, sports equipment, student conference, student fees, transportation, and other.

⁵ There were some cases in which funds were underutilized. Over the five years of the study, an average of six schools per year spent 50% or less of funds. This was most often the case when there was a change in school administration. New principals who were not briefed on the program regularly failed to access funds and/or were not familiar enough with the school to set priorities.



26 items the Student Opportunity Fund has been used for over the past five years

Every year, principals commit funds to a wide assortment of unique expenses that are difficult to quantify but have significance to students and their families. Some examples include the following:

1. Ambulance fee
2. Eyeglasses
3. Entrance fee for dance competition
4. Bed for student living on his or her own
5. Birth certificate application
6. Alarm clock
7. Addictions counselling
8. Funeral expenses
9. Educational assessment
10. Sign language course
11. Dental work
12. Laundry money
13. Prenatal vitamins
14. EpiPen
15. Bicycle (for transportation to a job)
16. Headstone
17. Maternity clothes
18. Cosmetology kits
19. Toaster oven
20. Post-secondary application fees
21. Swimming lessons
22. Graduation photo sitting and gown rentals
23. Soccer cleats
24. Participation in leadership conferences
25. Haircut for a job interview
26. Lice soap

Fund Use Patterns

Schools face different challenges based on geography and population. To highlight some of the differences in program spending, schools were separated to look at any differences between urban and rural schools, usage by province, and also between Catholic and public schools.

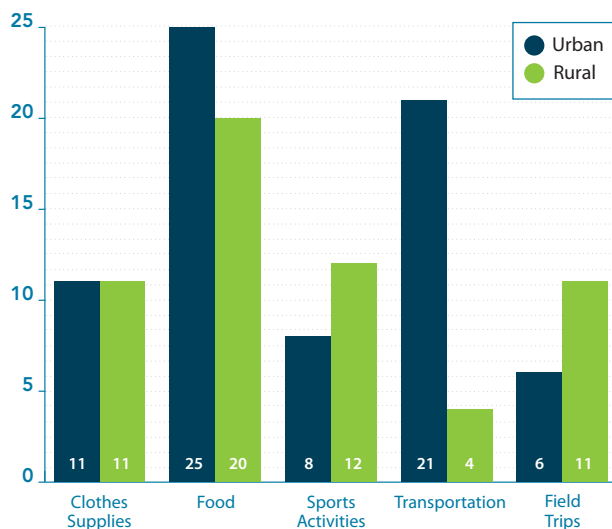
The overarching focus of funding does not change drastically with this breakdown, however there are some notable differences between the school breakdowns that are worth reviewing.

Urban and Rural Comparison

As all rural schools in the study were located in Ontario, they have been compared with urban schools in the same province. The chart below represents a comparison of these Ontario urban and rural schools. In total, this data represents 18 urban schools and seven rural schools, with the addition of an eighth rural school in 2013/14.

Food was a top spending category for both urban and rural schools. Urban schools spent more than rural schools on transportation, while rural schools consistently spent more on sports activities and field trips. Rural schools were also more likely to carry a larger balance of funding over between years.

Urban and Rural Spending Comparison in Top Five Categories 2010-2014



Percentage of total budget per geographic category averaged over five years.

Food

Food ranks as one of the highest areas of spending for both urban and rural schools, with the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years showing the highest average percentage of spending in five years. Over the past five years, urban schools spent 15–42% of their budget on food, while rural schools spent 12–35%.

Transportation

For urban schools, transportation ranks as one of the top priorities in spending, along with food. Over the past five years, urban schools typically spent between 16 and 25% of their budget on transportation, while rural schools have spent a considerably lower 1–7%. This is due to the availability of bussing programs in rural communities and the lack of public transportation. It also reflects the transportation costs borne by lower income families in cities.

Sports Activities

Spending on sports activities ranks as a priority for both urban and rural schools. While rural schools spend between 6 and 18% of their budget on them, urban schools spend between 4 and 11%. 2014 marked the first year that rural spending on sports programs dipped, falling to 6% from an average of 13% in previous years.

Clothes / Supplies

Clothes and supplies have been consistent budget items for both urban (8–16%) and rural (9–14%) schools. There has been a year-to-year consistency in funding levels for this category for the past five years in both types of schools.

Field Trips

Also of interest is the category of field trips, which, although not represented on the above graph, does show a difference in spending between urban and rural populations.

Field trips show a greater funding focus in rural schools, with anywhere from 9 to 16% of the budget going towards trips, as opposed to urban schools, who typically used between 5 and 7% of funding for this purpose. This might be due to the greater availability of a variety of nearby field trip opportunities in an urban setting.

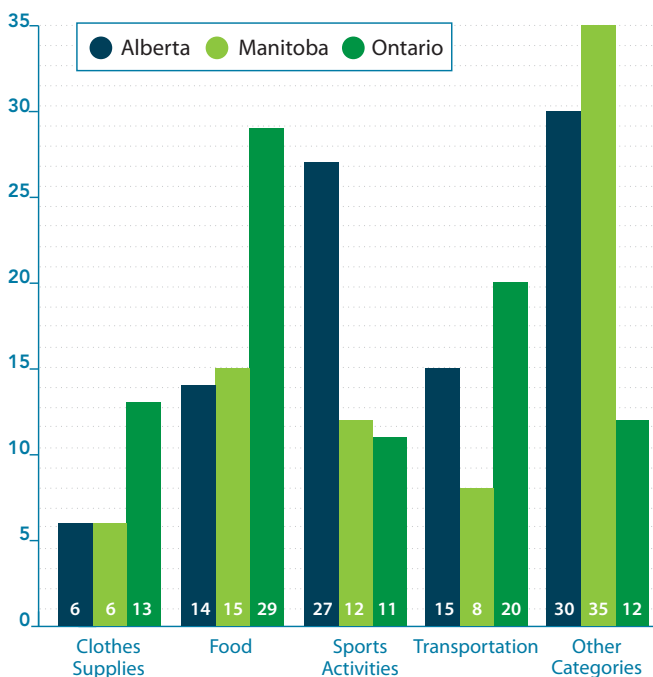
Balance Forward

As noted, schools were encouraged to carry forward funding rather than rush to spend remaining amounts at year-end. Rural schools were far more likely than urban schools to do this from year to year, with 12–38% of their budget carried over, as compared to urban schools, who carried no more than 3–15% over from year to year. It is unclear why this is the case, however, there may be a correlation with the higher level of community involvement in rural schools, as suggested in survey results.

Provincial Comparisons

Schools in this study were located in three provinces: Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. When viewed in a provincial comparison, the funding focus of different geographical areas also shows some interesting trends.

Provincial Spending Comparison in Top Five Categories 2010-2014



Percentage of total budget per province averaged over five years. Manitoba typically allots more than the other provinces to the categories of: student fees, medical, graduation expenses, and unused balance forward.

Food

Food ranks consistently as the highest priority in Ontario, with spending between 15 and 40% of total budget over the past five years. Manitoba and Alberta typically spend from 7 to 14%, but trends show that spending in this area for these two provinces has been increasing in recent years.

Transportation

Transportation accounts for between 12 and 21% of the Ontario and the Alberta spending—it vies with food on an annual basis for the highest spending category for these two provinces. In comparison, Manitoba schools only spent between 5 and 7% annually on transportation costs.

Sports Activities

Alberta consistently spends more of their budget (between 14 and 26%) on sports activities than the other two provinces. Ontario and Manitoba typically spend between 4 and 15% on sports activities.

Clothes/Supplies

Out of all three provinces, this category consistently has a higher focus in Ontario schools, with spending between 8 and 14% of their total budgets. Manitoba and Alberta run from 0.5 to 9% of total budget.

Although they didn't register as key areas of focus on the overall funding analysis, the categories of field trips, student fees, and grad expenses stood out in the provincial comparison.

Carry Over Funding

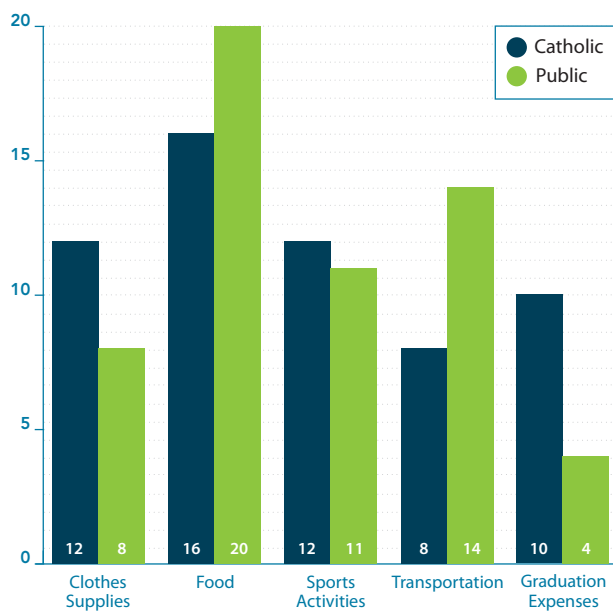
Manitoba schools (15–60%) are far more likely than Ontario or Alberta (3–15%) schools to carry over funding for the following year.

The variety of funding and the evidence of regional and geographical differences in funding focus appear to indicate that there are trends in each area and that specific local needs are being met by this fund. The five-year trends show the natural ebb and flow of issues that educators face with students, and the relative consistency of funding in the segmented studies shows the longer-term needs of each group of schools.

Catholic and Public Schools Comparison

The study included seven schools operating within Catholic boards and 34 schools in public boards. Some modest differences could be seen in use of funds between these two systems.

Public and Catholic Spending Comparison in Top Five Categories 2010-2014



Clothes / Supplies

Catholic schools have spent a five-year average of 12% on student clothes and supplies, compared to an average of 8% for public schools. This is possibly due to the uniforms required in Catholic schools.

Food

In keeping with the overall trend in spending, Catholic and public schools both spent the majority of their funding on food, with a five-year average of 16% of annual spending for Catholic schools and 20% for public schools.

Sports Activities

Both sets of schools spend about an equal amount of their budget on sports activities, averaging 12% for Catholic and 11% for public schools.

Transportation

A larger difference lies in the amounts spent on transportation, which accounts for a five-year average of 8% for Catholic schools, but 14% of average spending for public schools. This might be due to greater use of bussing for students in Catholic schools. However, it might also be an indicator of the higher priority placed on other expenses such as uniforms and graduation expenses.

Graduation Expenses

A gap in the five-year average spending for graduation expenses is evident, with almost 10% of spending from Catholic schools going to this category, and only 3.5% from public schools.



SURVEY RESULTS

Access to Other Funding Sources

Principals and administrators provided the following feedback on Student Opportunity and related funding.

"We find the fund makes a significant difference in the lives of many of the students at our school. For some it assists with lunches where access to healthy (and/or enough) food is challenging. Our school has a significant number of students and families dealing with poverty. The fund helps 'level' the playing field in giving them a variety of opportunities."

Schools in Canada often rely on a combination of fees and fundraising to supplement their core and extra-curricular programming. The schools covered in this report indicated that fees and fundraising activities cover many funding gaps for programs, including everything from sports, to field trips, to breakfast and snack programs.

In addition to student opportunity funding, 64% (25 out of 39) of schools surveyed cited access to other funding sources for students, which included various breakfast or food programs (23 out of 25 schools), funding for newcomers and basic needs, as well as community and staff fundraising for sports and events. This additional funding is often targeted and does not allow as much discretion as the Student Opportunity Fund.

Other research on school reliance on fundraising has shown that in Canada, schools in high-income areas fundraise five times more per year, on average, than schools in low-income areas.⁵ Along the same lines, the top 10% of fundraising schools raise as much as the bottom 81% altogether.⁶ This inability to secure discretionary funds on the part of schools serving lower-income communities reinforces disparities between students and schools.

What are the biggest funding-related issues facing youth in your school right now?

As expected, survey respondents identified the same priorities for funding as was reflected in the data. Access to nutritious food dominated the responses followed by funding for sports activities, and subsidizing field trips and transportation. Respondents also identified these additional areas of need:

- Academic fees (exam costs for Advanced Placement tests and International Baccalaureate)
- Basic clothing needs
- School supplies and books
- Medical prescriptions, eyeglasses, and special needs equipment

Where do you see room for improvement with the Student Opportunity Fund?

Not surprisingly, several respondents suggested increasing the amount of the grant and widening the scope of the Supporting Innovative Educators program. 22% of respondents wished that the program provided greater scope of funding while 16% requested an increase in availability of funds and 11% thought that more schools should be made aware of the fund.

"The amount of funds that have been available have decreased from last year. It would be regrettable if this trend continues for next year and for years to come."

Respondents also identified that communication tools would help with the administration of the grant and reduce issues for new principals or other administrators.

"The funding is invaluable to support students in ways that I am not able to support them with Ministry funds, but at times I would like to have a better understanding on the breadth of how the funds can be spent."

*"Information for new principals would be great: how the program works, how to access funds, etc."*⁸

⁵ Based on a comparison of schools in Ontario including the lowest 10% of communities where the average family income is \$44,455, compared to \$152,773 in highest 10% income schools. People for Education, "Mind the Gap: Inequality in Ontario's Schools," Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools (2013): 6.

⁶ People for Education, "Mind the Gap: Inequality in Ontario's Schools," Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools (2013).

⁷ In cases where funding was reduced, schools had large carry forwards over several years.

⁸ Currently, schools receive an annual grant letter outlining the intended uses for the fund along with an annual report outlining activities from all schools involved in the program. It may be valuable to develop other tools for communication.

CONCLUSION

The Student Opportunity Fund micro grant program appears to be a modest, successful exercise. The program is effective in getting much needed resources into the hands of qualified people who can use them best to support students in need. Overall, principals and school administrators have used funds to make thoughtful and targeted investments in young people. With a few exceptions where there has been a change in administration, the schools have been good stewards of funds and have been very accountable in their reporting.

Looking at the past five years of the program, overall trends can clearly be seen. Not the least of these is the common challenge faced by educators in addressing student hunger and nutrition. Given discretionary resources, feeding students was consistently the first priority for educators. Systemic issues like this cannot be addressed solely through the provision of small ad hoc grants and school fundraising. It is important that the education system work with the community and government to address this issue going forward.

In addition to food, schools in three provinces prioritized sports activities, student transportation, and clothing/supplies as their highest priority investments. Given resources, it is likely that other schools with similar demographics would make the same types of investments.

As noted in the three comparison evaluations (rural/urban, Catholic/public, and provincial), individual school needs are rarely the same. In granting the schools flexibility, educators are able to respond to needs as they arise. What's more, the Student Opportunity Fund can be used in ways which core funding cannot. The discretionary nature of the fund, with minimal reporting requirements, allows principals to be nimble and creative in their approach to students.

It is not possible to accurately measure whether the provision of a Student Opportunity Fund was a critical component in the long-term success of a given student. Providing a student with lunch, an alarm clock, bus tickets, a hair cut for a job interview, or the sitting fees for a graduation photo, are relatively minor investments. However, principals, teachers, and administrators who have participated in this study have demonstrated that small grants can be a useful tool in their efforts to create opportunities for young people who show promise but face significant obstacles in their lives.



George Harvey Collegiate institute Summer Academy Program



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Student Nutrition

The issue of student hunger and nutrition is a systemic and complex one that is not easily resolved. Universal student nutrition and food education programs have demonstrated great success in other countries. The most successful of these programs integrate provision of food with nutrition education. Small programs such as Beyond 3:30's Junior Chefs' Club show great promise, and should be disseminated. Such programs would also likely show a positive impact on life-long healthy eating patterns.

2. Review of Schools

There is likely not a public school in Canada without at least a few young people in need. However, over time, neighbourhoods change. What may once have been a school that serves a higher-needs community may require fewer resources, and vice versa. The funder should undertake a community review at least every five years to ensure that there are no other schools in the program areas that have equal or higher need for student opportunity funding.

3. Clarity of Use

Several school program managers indicated that they were unclear of the scope of the grant. A review of reporting, communications, and any documents that accompany each grant awarded would help identify areas where information might be more clearly communicated to staff.

4. Program Education

Canadian high schools often experience a regular turnover in administration. Active involvement with each school on a fund management level would help transition program knowledge and understanding when the individual school program contact moves on.

5. Sustainability and Expansion

This program is currently dependent on limited resources, and has no capacity to expand to additional schools. Long-term sustainability for this program is dependent on the involvement of other funders and/or school board and policy change allowing greater discretionary investments by principals.



CASE STUDIES

Several schools have developed innovative programs designed to support students and the community. A selection of case studies provides examples of successful programs which may merit future exploration.

Bishop McNally High School and Father Lacombe High School (Calgary, Alberta)

RISE Program

(Raising Individual Student Excellence)

The RISE program works with 25–30 teacher-identified grade 11 and 12 students each year who show great academic potential, but who are at high risk of not completing high school. These youth are either not enrolled in academic courses, or they have current grade averages that would restrict them from entering into colleges, technical institutions, or universities.

Students in the program receive focused academic and personal guidance and support from specially trained teachers and counsellors. In addition to an academic focus, youth develop team-building skills, goal setting skills, and leadership skills. They are also encouraged to volunteer both within the school and in the community, and they have access to professional tutors. Students also attend workshops and sessions with motivational speakers. They receive guidance on post-secondary education and career options, and attend tours of various colleges, universities, and institutions.

The RISE program was launched at Bishop McNally High School in 2006, and at Father Lacombe High School in 2011 with near 100% graduation record amongst participating students to date. An evaluation of this program is pending.



Windsor Park (Winnipeg, Manitoba)

Exam Breakfast Program

“A hungry high school student is not a new phenomenon, but the number and frequency of hungry high school students is something we have not seen before.” - School Program Leader

In addition to providing emergency breakfast or lunch to low-income students, Windsor Park Collegiate has implemented a breakfast program for the entire school body before exams. In the 2013/14 school year, approximately five students accessed the emergency food program daily. During exam time, 1,100 students received a breakfast in the exam centre. 80% of all students at the school participate in the exam breakfast program.

Teacher volunteers prepare and distribute food, and staff have noted that the camaraderie among students has increased because of this communal experience. Staff have also noted that students are not embarrassed to ask for a sandwich or a snack if they come to school hungry.



George Harvey Summer Academy (Toronto, Ontario)

Student Engagement

George Harvey Collegiate Institute serves a mix of students in a high-density urban neighbourhood. Many families in the community don't have the resources to provide enrichment opportunities for their children, and the area lacks a community centre and affordable summer programs. The school is challenged to serve the complex needs of a larger than average population of immigrant youth, yet according to indicators, they are making dramatic progress.

School staff identified the transition between grade 8 and 9 as an opportunity to engage the students at a critical time in their academic and social development.

The two-week Summer Academy program was established in 2009 to help students transition into grade 9. An average of 60 students participate every year in a combination of academic review and assessment, introduction to high school life, and leadership, team-building and recreational activities.

The program also involves up to 30 grade 10, 11, and 12 students who act as mentors and activity leaders. The Leadership Academy is run in conjunction with Muskoka Woods as part of a leadership development credit program. Involvement of senior students encourages grade 9 students to connect with positive school peer leaders while allowing those leaders to use the tools they have learned in the program.

Measuredoutcome.org evaluated both the Summer Academy and the associated leadership programs in a 2012 study. The study indicated that summer academy students achieve 0.8 more credits on average by the end of grade 10 than students who did not participate in the summer academy. School staff have noted improvements in student transition and an increased involvement in school clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities since the Academy was launched. To read the 2012/13 report, and for more information on the Summer Academy program, visit www.measuredoutcome.org.



*George Harvey Collegiate Institute
Summer Academy Program*

Rockcliffe Middle School (Toronto, Ontario)

Beyond 3:30 Program

Through Rockcliffe's Beyond 3:30's Junior Chefs' Club, a rotating group of participants work together every weeknight to make a nutritious and cost-effective meal for all of the participants. With the supervision of qualified nutrition staff, students learn and expand on the essential life-skills of preparing meals.

The free meals act as an incentive for students to sign up for the program. With many parents working two or three jobs, cooking at home is not a priority. Many students in the program have never chopped vegetables or stirred a pot in their lives. The introduction of a couponing element to the course has further allowed program staff to discuss budgeting, as well as help the program with the rising cost of food supplies.

In addition to community-building dinners with parents, teachers, principals, and students, staff report hearing parents talk about how their relationships with their children have improved, and how their children are now cooking for their entire families at home.

"We are so impressed with our son's progress, his homework is done every day, he's getting better grades, he's preparing his own snacks and even makes us dinner. We have even noticed that his physical fitness is better; he has more energy and seems to be able to focus more. He even talks to us more about his day and has new friends. This dinner tastes amazing! Your staff are great and we are so happy to be part of this program, thank you." - Parent



TFSS Beyond 3:30 Program



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