

Promoting Literacy, Social Emotional Learning and Parent/Community Involvement in
Inner City Schools: Combining Evidence-based Research
and Experiential Knowledge



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The information presented in this report is the sole responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of The Vancouver District School Board, British Columbia, Canada.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children living in socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods have a myriad of disadvantages facing them and their families. These include poorer physical health, increased social stressors, greater incidences of emotional, behavioural and cognitive problems and more difficulties in school. Thus, when exploring how to help children in elementary schools who live in disadvantaged areas, their physical state, social and familial influences, the environment, institutions such as schools and community services and the prevailing public policy become important contextual considerations.

The purpose of this review was to explore the research evidence and best practices related to the three foundational goals of a group of Inner City Schools in the Vancouver School Board. These goals are promoting literacy, promoting social-emotional development and facilitating parent and community engagement. Along with looking at the research, the experiential knowledge of principals, teachers, staff, parents, students and community organizations who are associated with the 12 Inner City Schools was acquired. An asset-based approach was taken, focusing on identifying successful strategies associated with the foundational goals and recommendations for future action.

For promoting literacy, current best practices recommend a systemic approach that is comprehensive, incorporates early detection and serves as a preventative strategy- identifying and assisting students before they fall behind. The research also shows that early intervention is very effective for this population and works best with small groups or one-on-one instruction. Key features of a literacy program include flexibility, frequent assessment and monitoring, child-based individualized and ability-level instruction and frequent application. All literacy programs should include a variety of approaches, be culturally and developmentally appropriate for the ability level and include dedicated time for instruction. Finally, a holistic approach is required that: a) considers the social-emotional influence on school achievement; b) addresses family needs (e.g., family literacy); c) utilizes community programs and services that support literacy; and, d) addresses the needs of the child (sense of belonging, is enjoyable/fun, is applicable to their life).

The main recommendations of school staff associated with school literacy focused on whole-school and school district change initiatives. These included: the need for addition training and professional development; greater information sharing; earlier assessment and intervention support; greater human resources such as literacy coaches, librarians, and access to

psychological assessments and speech pathologists; more material resources such as texts; flexible working hours; and, greater opportunities to connect with families and community.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is particularly important for vulnerable children. The research evidence shows that SEL programming for children at-risk needs to be grounded in theory, provide developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction and address the multitude of social skills important in development. When choosing which programs to use for SEL, the research presented recommends that program planners: consider the current needs of the school or school district using a needs assessment; match identified needs with research-based interventions; use both school-wide and program specific approaches; ensure that programming covers multiple years; choose programs that include families and communities; implement SEL from preschool through to high school; and make sure that the program is developmentally appropriate. Other SEL implementation recommendations include ensuring the emotional competency of teachers, using teachers as program leaders, promoting a climate conducive to SEL, receiving support from educational leaders, adequate training and including an evaluation component.

According to Inner City Counselors, Youth and Family Workers, Neighbourhood Assistants and Teachers, most of the SEL efforts centre around school-based initiatives such as implementing the code of conduct, having students give morning announcements, bringing in guest speakers and art and play therapy. Out of school programming was also highlighted such as outdoor education camps, KidSafe and programs given before, at noon and after school. Support roles and case conferences were also identified as necessary, as was the meal plan and food related events. Very few evidence-based programs are currently being used in the schools in a systematic way. Those programs that are being used focus on violence prevention such as peer helpers, RSVP and anti-homophobic training. When participants were asked to identify the most effective strategy at their school for promoting SEL, the majority chose professional support and out of school programming. Students focused on school-based SEL programming, out of school programming, the importance of professional staff, student leadership programs, social responsibility clubs and community service programs.

The schools in the Inner City Project are all utilizing a school-wide approach for SEL (code of conduct, student recognition, etc), however a more coordinated effort is needed for program specific methods. As well, more concerted effort is needed to address SEL programming district-wide, addressing team-building, networking and training as well as identifying guidelines for how to assess student need and when community-based help should be acquired.

Considerable research over the last 20 years has shown that family involvement in children's education has positive benefits to the child. The research evidence shows that higher parental involvement is associated with higher student academic achievement, better attendance, a readiness to do homework, increased graduation rates, students' sense of competence, better self-regulatory skills, and beliefs about the importance of education. For at-risk children, family involvement is even more important and is associated with increased achievement in both academic and social emotional development. As well, parental involvement in school, improves child-teacher relationships and the child's feelings about school for low income children and youth.

Increasing family engagement should take a systemic approach which includes collecting information about parents' availability and creating flexibility in the timing of school events and spaces for inclusion. Parents recommended that schools provide spaces for them to meet and celebrate different cultures. Special events, particularly those involved with food such as potlucks, are highly appreciated by the families in the Inner City Schools. Developing mechanisms for information sharing about resources and programs for all Inner City School parents as well as networking opportunities for different groups such as the parent advisory council was suggested. Parents would also like to see a parent mentoring program established and the opportunity for honorariums for translation services.

Community partnerships that promote out of school learning (OSL) can improve student development. The research shows that student participation in OSL can result in less disciplinary action, lower dropout rates, better academic performance in school, improved homework completion, and improved work habits. As well, these programs situate youth in safe environments, prevent them from engaging in delinquent activities, teaches general and specific skills, beliefs, and behaviors and provides opportunities for youth to develop relationships with peers and mentors. After school and summer programming is particularly important for poorer youth due to an opportunity gap where lower income children and youth have less access to enrichment opportunities than their more affluent peers.

The recommendations from the research are echoed by the community surveys. According to community partners, the Inner City Schools could enhance community-school collaboration by developing opportunities for collaboration in networking, meetings, and joint funding applications. As well, increased communication of community services to families would assist efforts as would access to school grounds and students at-risk for providing services. Providing more funding to

run programs and a dedicated position for facilitating school-community collaboration would also help more families and children.

Many of the key ingredients for promoting literacy, SEL and parent and community engagement exist within the 12 schools. What the research recommends and what was often echoed by individuals associated with the schools, is **the need for a coordinated focus within and across schools regarding programming, networking, training and professional development**. Specifically, the following recommendations are suggested for a systemic, curricular and organizational practice for enhancing literacy, enhancing social emotional learning, enhancing family and community involvement and assessment and evaluation.

SYSTEMIC, CURRICULAR AND ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

From a structural perspective, *look at differentiation in the Inner City Schools*. At the same time, consider coordinating programming, networking, training, and professional development **across** all Inner City Schools.

1. Re-evaluate the mission, purpose of the Inner City Program, common values and the roles and responsibilities of the positions attached to it
2. Review funding allocation based on school size and outside support such as the *Community Links* Program to ensure there is not duplication of resources
3. Consider creating a position responsible for Inner City Schools and community linkages
4. Focus on team building and coordination across programming such as developing networking, training, dedicated time, and guidelines for best practice
5. Ensure those working in the Inner City Schools are experienced (at least 5 years) and for principals, have additional training
6. Encourage staff consistency in the Inner City Schools (e.g. minimum 5 years) to promote continuity of relationships with students, parents, staff and community agencies
7. Consider funding /support for best practice programs and encourage multiple schools use the same programming to provide support, mentoring, etc.
8. Adopt the *Inner City Schools Literacy Plan*.
- 9 Adopt the *Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum* across all Inner City schools
10. Support more networking opportunities between staff to share successes and ideas as well as provide support across the Inner City schools

11. Use the Inner City Schools conference as a venue for highlighting effective practices amongst those working in the Inner City Schools, families and community
12. Ensure that reviews of the Inner City Schools include feedback from the teachers, support workers, parents, community partners and students
13. Develop district wide guidelines for assessment and evaluation

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING LITERACY: An Inner City School Literacy Plan

Important elements of this plan would include the following:

1. Place an emphasis on early intervention programming
2. Use a multi-tiered approach for identifying and addressing ability level needs
3. Adopt a collaborative model that supports integrated literacy activity of different roles within schools, in relation to assessment, instruction and evaluation
4. Ensure district wide support of programs that are evidence based in relation to training, financial and human support and professional development
5. Provide opportunities for networking across all Inner City Schools
6. Provide continued support for family involvement/programming
7. Develop a coordinated plan for involving community in supporting literacy initiatives during out-of-school hours

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING:

A Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

1. Conduct a SEL needs assessment for all schools within the Inner City Project
2. Provide teachers/support worker with emotional competency training through professional development efforts
3. Develop a VSB district wide policy that supports SEL programming in each grade--that includes both school-wide and program SEL training, ensuring that all core competencies are addressed (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making), includes components involving families and communities, and guidelines for assessment and outside referral. Example:

A Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

K- Roots of Empathy
1- Emotional literacy (PATHS)

- 2-Problem-solving (*Restorative Justice*)
3. Emotional literacy " *Wits*"
4. *Roots of Empathy*
5. Anti-bullying " *Steps to Success*"
6. Conflict resolution
7. Leadership training and community service and learning

Meanwhile, schools should continue whole school efforts such as code of conduct, peer mediation, guest lecturers, student recognition, after school clubs, and out of school programs

4. Facilitate networking opportunities for all individuals working on SEL across the Inner City Schools
5. Support SEL efforts by providing training in implementation, assessment and evaluation
6. Develop a multi-discipline SEL approach within schools and across the Inner City Schools
7. Develop a program for engaging and providing SEL information to parents
8. Develop a coordinated approach with community agencies to support SEL in out of school hours

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Establish of a parent center, a home visitor program, and action research teams in order to promote parent involvement
- Reach out to all families, not just those most easily contacted, and involve them in all major roles, from tutoring to governance
- Provide parent education information and training opportunities
- Provide family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services
- Provide networks to link all families with parent representatives, information about community services, etc.
- Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.
- Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs
- Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school
- Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress
- Recruit and organize parent help and support

- Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning
- Involve families and their children in all important curriculum-related decisions
- Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
- Ensure active parent advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation
- Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school
- Offer training and/or honorariums to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents (e.g., translation services)
- Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups
- Provide cultural event opportunities
- Ensure support is available for participation such as child minding
- Encourage parents' involvement in classrooms
- Ensure afterschool programs are available
- Provide spaces for programming for out-of-school learning
- Develop a Parent Mentor program
- Develop mechanism for information sharing about resources and programs to all IC school parents
- Continue fun events with food (community cultural fair, potlucks)
- Provide flexible staff hours

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Share resources with community agencies
- Promote out-of-school learning
- Develop cooperative/joint funding applications
- Provide services to families (e.g., child minding)

- Extend school staff hours
- Provide fun and exciting programs
- Provide training to staff
- Provide access to schools on weekends and evenings
- Provide knowledge of community agency/services to families
- Share information about children to better meet their needs
- Increase capacity building with families
- Formalize relationship to enhance information sharing, communication and collaboration
- Budget for out of school learning
- Provide structured feedback from schools to community agencies
- Continue to support creative/flexible solutions
- Increase school staffing
- Involve community staff in school conferences, workshops, meetings that serve Inner City kids
- Ensure consistency in school staffing to support relationships
- Dedicate a position for school-community collaboration
- Have regular meetings
- Provide more resources (financial/equipment)
- Recognize barriers to collaboration and address them
- Conduct a needs assessment of community services
- Allow greater presence in schools

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Provide a clear description of programming, resources required and percentage of time required
- Collect baseline data by grade in the Fall
- Collect post program data by grade at the end of Spring
- Provide qualitative evaluation/impressions of programming successes and lessons learned provided by each support worker/teacher
- Provide rationale for new planning decisions based on evidence
- School district to provide a template of a good review
- Provide a description of the programs used
- Use consistency in data measures to compare different schools/programs, e.g., DRA, FSA
- Use consistency in what is measured, e.g., #maintaining, meeting or exceeding expectations
- Use consistency in when measurements are taken. E.g. Same year- Spring-Fall
- Identify teacher professional development and resource support required

INTRODUCTION

In exploring the best way to provide for a group of schools located in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, this review examined the literature on effective programming for promoting literacy, social emotional development and parent-community engagement as well as on effective schools. Further, key informant interviews were conducted with school district personnel, focus groups were conducted with teachers, support workers, principals, parents and students and surveys were conducted with community agencies. Taking an assets based approach, individuals associated with the school were asked what has been successful in the 12 schools, what programs, methods or strategies have been effective for promoting either literacy, social-emotional development or parent/community engagement and how would they improve the situation. Finally, a review of the current programming, measures of assessment and resulting student outcomes was performed for each school.

Children living in socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods have a myriad of disadvantages facing them and their families. These include poorer physical health, increased social stressors, greater incidences of emotional, behavioural and cognitive problems and more difficulties in school.^{1,2,3,4,5} A useful scheme of looking at the impact of disadvantaged areas on children is through an ecological framework. Most notably is Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory*,⁶ which focuses on a series of five nested environmental contexts with bi-directional influences within and between the systems, where any or a combination of them may influence child development. Each system (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) contains roles, norms and rules that can powerfully shape how a child develops. Thus, when exploring how to help children in elementary schools who live in disadvantaged areas, their physical state, social and familial influences, the environment, institutions such as schools and community services and the prevailing public policy become important contextual considerations.

Children living in poverty have shown to have worse health outcomes compared to other children when functional health (a combination of vision, hearing, speech, mobility, dexterity, cognition, emotion, pain and discomfort) is evaluated.⁷ As well, children in lower SES neighbourhoods are more likely to experience injuries,^{8,9} likely due to poorer quality of housing, fewer safe play areas, and proximity to high traffic and/or industrial areas.¹⁰

Social stressors such as increased drug use, a higher incidence of child abuse and domestic conflicts, a higher prevalence of mental health problems, threats to physical safety and an

increased incidence of teenage pregnancy and illiteracy have been reported for low income areas.¹¹ As well, Evans and colleagues found in their longitudinal study of 339 children (initially in grades 3-5) that poorer neighbourhoods are noisier, more crowded and frenetic, where children experience less family structure and predictable daily routines. As result, children from these environments exhibited greater psychological distress, learned helplessness and poorer self-regulated behavior.¹²

Chronic noise exposure has also been associated with negative long term memory abilities, visual search performance, impaired speech perception^{13,14} and increased hyperactivity.¹⁵ Along with noise pollution, crowding has been shown to negatively impact social-emotional behaviour in children. Children in crowded conditions exhibit more social withdrawal,¹⁶ elevated aggression and diminished cooperation.¹⁷ As well, crowding has shown to be associated with greater attentional deficits,¹⁸ lower IQ scores¹⁹ and greater psychophysical stress.^{20, 21}

The physical layout of the environment within neighbourhoods can also negatively impact child development. Children living in high-rise buildings vs. low-rise have been shown to exhibit more behavioural problems²² and worse academic performance,²³ however, these results have not been replicated.²⁴ As well, there has been some evidence of increased psychological distress²⁵ and impaired cognitive functioning²⁶ in poor quality housing. Housing in close proximity to street traffic has also been correlated with restrictions in outdoor play, smaller social networks and reduced social and motor skills for 5-year-olds.²⁷

The above portrayal of the impact on children living in disadvantaged areas clearly indicates the need to consider child, family and community contexts. Children from disadvantaged areas require considerations such as: 1) addressing basic needs (e.g., food security, instability, mobility); 2) family considerations (e.g., resources, caregiver focus/time, skills, attributes); 3) access to community resources (e.g. safe environment, quality daycare, after school programming, access to health/social service facilities); and, environmental influences such as the physical environment.

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THIS REVIEW

For the majority of schools represented in this review, they are in the poorer neighbourhoods in Vancouver, British Columbia and have the greatest levels of developmental vulnerabilities in early childhood. In 2002, these neighbourhoods had high levels of unemployment, low-income status,

social assistance rates, low educational attainment and high rates of lone-parenthood, according to Hertzman and colleagues²⁸

In Canada, inequalities in child development emerge in a systematic fashion over the first five years of life, according to well-recognized factors: family income, parental education, parenting style, neighbourhood safety and cohesion, neighbourhood socioeconomic differences, and access to quality child care and developmental opportunities. By age 5, a 'gradient' in early child development emerges, such that, as one goes from the families with the lowest to highest incomes, least to most parental education, and least to most nurturing and interactive parenting style, the average quality of early childhood experiences increases (p. iv).

Description of the Schools

Since 2006, 12 schools and 3 annexes in The Vancouver School Board have been designated "Inner City Schools". These schools were identified based on the socio-economic status (SES) of the children and families attending the schools, factoring in: income level, number of children in care, educational level, mobility statistics, percentage on income assistance, single parent households and crime statistics. The model used for providing support for these students have included 4 extra staff positions, a subsidized meal program and all day kindergarten programs. The extra positions include an Inner City Project Teacher (ICPT), a Youth and Family Worker (YFW), a Staff Assistant (SA) and a Neighbourhood Assistant (NA). These additional human resources are meant to facilitate equitable educational outcomes in three main areas: promoting literacy, enhancing social emotional development and facilitating parent and community engagement.

The purpose of this report is to: explore best practices in these three areas both nationally and internationally through a systematic review of the scientific and organizational literature; review current practices in the designated schools through focus groups, key informant interviews and surveys; and evaluate the current programming from a program evaluation lens.

Methodology

The literature review focused solely on programming for children in disadvantaged areas using the following descriptors: children at risk, poor, disadvantaged, impoverished, literacy, social emotional development, parent involvement or community involvement/engagement, and effective schools. Internet sites and peer reviewed articles from the following databases were

explored: *ERIC, PsychINFO, CINAHL, Academic Search Complete, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Teacher Reference Center.*

To examine what has been successful in the designated schools and identify recommendations for future action, focus groups, key informant interviews and surveys were conducted. Six focus groups were conducted with individuals from the schools, on: 1) promoting literacy with project teachers, literacy coaches and teacher librarians (n=16); 2) promoting social-emotional development with Youth and Family Workers, Counselors and Student Support Workers (n=11); 3) promoting parent/community engagement with Neighborhood Assistants, Youth and Family Workers, Counselors, Principals and Assistant Workers (n=8); 4) promoting parent/community engagement with parents, and Social and Health Service Providers (n=22); 5) determining what works well in the schools and recommendations for future action with students in grades 6 and 7 (n=26), and, 6) identifying changes in the Inner City Project model to improve outcomes for vulnerable children with Principals (n=10).

Key informant interviews were also conducted over the telephone with senior school board staff responsible for programming in the Inner City Schools in the areas of literacy and social emotional development.

Finally, an internet survey was conducted with community service providers such as community centres, libraries, a police liaison officer, health workers and youth agencies (n=9), exploring the following questions: 1) what is working well in your partnership with an Inner City School?; 2) what structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?; and, 3) how could the partnership between your agency and the VCB Inner-City Project be strengthened?

The last component of this review involved a program evaluation of the literacy, social-emotional development and parent/community involvement efforts in the 12 schools. Based on their 2008 review to the school board, the measures, statistics, goals, strategies, outcomes and future planning decisions were examined for literacy, social-emotional development and parent/community involvement (see Appendix A). The evaluation looked at which programs were used, how they were used, when assessment/evaluations were conducted, the outcomes associated with the various programs and whether the future planning goals matched current outcomes and need.

PROMOTING LITERACY

Promoting literacy is one of the three foundational goals of all of the Inner City Schools. This section will present important determinants influencing literacy, research associated with promoting family literacy and literacy for English learners, the best practice evidence related to literacy and children at-risk, a summary of evidence-based programs shown to improve literacy outcomes and finally, a description of successful practices and recommendations from those working in the Inner City schools.

A holistic approach to promoting literacy, that considers the multiple influences of the individual, family and community was used. Linked to literacy outcomes, in Canada and throughout the world, have been children's feelings about their capabilities and engagement, family considerations, sociocultural impacts and community influences.

Individual Considerations

The international study, *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)* surveyed the reading literacy of approximately 215,000 fourth-grade level students across 40 countries and collected extensive information about individual, home, school, and community influences on students literacy.²⁹ Students with the most positive self-reported attitudes toward reading also had the highest achievement scores. This finding supports the research indicating a connection between children's attitudes about school and their early academic performance in literacy.³⁰

Family Influences

Family influences such as access to learning resources, expectations and practices can also make a difference for children's literacy outcomes. Children living in poverty typically have fewer children's books,^{31,32} are less likely to have a computer³³ and tend to watch more television.^{34,35} Further, parents living in poverty are less likely to read to their children on a daily basis or visit the library, compared to more affluent families.^{36,37} Parents living in poverty are also less likely to volunteer and attend school functions or monitor homework compared with the parents of children from middle and upper-income communities.³⁸

Families can positively impact their child's literacy by becoming more involved in their education. Miedel and Reynolds³⁹ found that the greater number of activities (e.g., volunteer in class, attend field trips) in which parents participated in during preschool and kindergarten was significantly

associated with higher reading achievement at age 14, and lower rates of grade retention and years in special education. Likewise, Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins and Weiss,⁴⁰ in their longitudinal analysis of 281 poor children, found that increased school involvement between kindergarten and grade 5 predicted improved child literacy levels. Further, greater involvement in school activities mediated the average literacy performance gap between children of more and less educated mothers. Finally, Barnard⁴¹ found that parent involvement in school was significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time graduation, and highest grade completed, even after controlling for child and family background characteristics. Interesting research has also explored the impact of parental and teacher expectations on student outcomes. Gill and Reynolds⁴² in their analysis of a large number of poor children (n=712) in the *Chicago Longitudinal Study*, found that both parent expectations for children's educational attainment and teacher expectations of children's school success were significantly and independently associated with higher reading and math achievement scores at age 12.

Sociocultural Considerations

Research looking at the influence of sociocultural considerations on literacy often examines the impact of family literacy programs. Overall, the efficacy of family literacy programs has been equivocal, in part due to a paucity of evidence-based research.⁴³ One program which simulated a literature-based school program that included classroom literacy centers, teacher-modeled literature activities, and literacy center time with parents, teachers and children in grades 1-3, showed that using developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive activities was effective for increasing achievement and motivation for students at-risk.⁴⁴ It is likely that the success of this program was due not only to the use of educational best practice methods but also the incorporation of the parents and children's sociocultural knowledge. This is particularly important for Inner City Schools where there is a high composition of children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Schools and school-based programs which incorporate the 'funds of knowledge' children and families bring from their homes and communities into the curriculum^{45,46} will seem more relevant to the child, promote cultural diversity and engagement. As Carney⁴⁷ found, family involvement in children's education 'enables both teachers and parents to understand the ways each defines, values and uses literacy as part of cultural practices' (p. 23).

Community-based Early Intervention Programs

One of the largest and most comprehensive studies to date, that explores the impact of community-based child-centered efforts to improve literacy (amongst other goals) in areas of high disadvantage, is *The Chicago Longitudinal Study*.^{48,49} This initiative was developed in an effort to equalize the opportunities for a large number of children growing up in high poverty regions of Chicago. Entitled the *Child–Parent Center Program (CPC) Program*, it is a center-based early intervention program that provides comprehensive educational and family-support services to economically disadvantaged children from preschool to third grade. The focus of the program is to promote children's academic success, particularly reading/language skills,⁵⁰ provide comprehensive services and to facilitate parent involvement in children's lives. Comprehensive services include: (a) attending to their nutritional and health needs (i.e. free breakfasts, lunches and health screening); (b) coordinated adult supervision, including a CPC head teacher, parent resource teacher, school-community representative, and a teacher aide for each class; (c) funds for centralized in-service teacher training in child development as well as instructional supplies; and (d) an emphasis on reading readiness through reduced class size, reading and writing activities in the learning center, reinforcement and feedback.⁵¹ Currently, the CPC program is conducted in 23 centers throughout the Chicago public schools. Eighteen centers are located in separate buildings close to the elementary school, and five are attached to the wings of the parent elementary school.

The effectiveness of these programs were examined over an 18 year period. Nine hundred and ninety-eight children who participated in the CPC program were compared to 550 children in kindergarten programs also located in low SES neighbourhoods. Along with long term benefits, the CPC program found significant associations between program participation and higher school achievement, lower rates of grade retention and placement of special education at age 15, lower rates of child maltreatment, lower dropout rates and higher high school completion rates at age 20.^{30,52, 53} By providing early literacy support, enough resources both physical and human, mandated parental involvement and comprehensive nutritional and health services, this program has shown to be a model for ameliorating the negative effects of poverty on children's well-being.

Effective Literacy Instruction for Children At-risk

There many different methods of teaching children to read. Dunst, Trivette, Masiello, Roper and Robyak⁵⁴ broadly break down literacy instruction into formal practices (typically taught by teachers) and informal practices (typically used by parents or caregivers). Formal practices

include: explicit instruction, contingent responsiveness, incidental teaching, embedded instruction, modeling, practitioner scaffolding, and teacher-mediated child learning. Informal practices are listed as: implicit instruction, caregiver responsiveness, responsive teaching, response elaboration, imitation, parent scaffolding and parent-mediated child learning. This point is raised to illustrate not only the large number of different strategies used but also to show the potentially negative impact on literacy, if children are not exposed to informal practices due to potential stressors associated with low SES, such as the lack of available time, resources or a focus on survival.

According to a teacher who taught kindergarten and grade 1 at an Inner City school for 20 years, many of the children she taught were in and out of foster care or had parents who were either on social assistance or working multiple jobs just to survive. These children were often cared for by relatives who had low literacy themselves or who primarily spoke another language. Although they seemed to care very much for the children, "their focus was on safety and survival not literacy. They were overwhelmed with immediate life and death needs such as getting dinner on the table and a roof over their heads" .

Key Informant Interview- Early Literacy Consultant.

Entry school-level literacy scores have been associated with the physical, social, and emotional characteristics of the child, the proportion of families in each school catchment area living below the low income cut-off, the community 5-year mobility rate, the proportion of single-parent families, the utilization of social assistance, and a home language other than English.^{55, 56}

Early Literacy Instruction

The large body of research on school readiness stresses the importance of **early exposure** to literacy interventions that might mediate some of the situations described above.^{57,58,59} Current educational and social efforts aimed at mediating the effect of low SES on children's academic achievement have focused on early intervention efforts such as quality preschool programs or enriched programming such as Head Start. The Centre for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA)⁶⁰ in their review of the research, have concluded that quality preschool programs are particularly beneficial for children who have not had informal learning opportunities at home. Early literacy programs for at-risk children should also address the child's **developmental considerations** such as, problems of time on task, attention span, and listening behaviors, as well as the routines related to learning activities.^{24, 61.}

Early literacy instruction has been shown to influence later school outcomes. A systematic empirical summation of research conducted by the *National Early Literacy Panel* ⁶² in 2009, concluded that the following precursor literacy skills had a medium to large relationship with later conventional literacy skills:

- Alphabet knowledge (AK): knowledge of the names and sounds associated with printed letters
- Phonological awareness (PA): the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes), independent of meaning
- Rapid automatic naming (RAN) of letters or digits: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters or digits
- RAN of objects or colors: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of repeating random sets of pictures of objects (e.g., "car," "tree," "house," "man") or colors
- Writing or writing name: the ability to write letters in isolation on request or to write one's own name
- Phonological memory: the ability to remember spoken information for a short period of time.

They also found that **different methods of instruction impact different skills**:

- The code-focused instructional efforts reported statistically significant and moderate to large effects across a broad spectrum of early literacy outcomes (conventional literacy skills).
- Book-sharing interventions produced statistically significant and moderate-sized effects on children's print knowledge and oral language skills, and the home and parent programs yielded statistically significant and moderate to large effects on children's oral language skills and general cognitive abilities.
- Studies of preschool and kindergarten programs produced significant and moderate to large effects on spelling and reading readiness.
- Language-enhancement interventions were successful at increasing children's oral language skills to a large and statistically significant degree.

Finally, **intensive instruction was found to be most helpful**. Most interventions that produced large and positive effects on children's code-related skills and conventional literacy skills were usually conducted as one-on-one or small-group instructional activities.

Quality early childhood programs make a long-term difference for children at-risk. Early childhood programs that focus on promoting social competencies (physical health, school achievement, psychological and emotional development, social relations with peers and family relations and development) can be very effective for vulnerable children. Reynolds (1998) ⁶³ identified 8 principles associated with effective early childhood programs (for children aged 3-8 years), which include: targeting children at risk using objective screening instruments; beginning participation early and continuing through to second or third grade; providing comprehensive child

development services that address the child's physical health, nutritional, social, psychological, emotional, and scholastic needs; encouraging active and multi-faceted parent involvement; having a child-centered, structured curriculum approach; having small class sizes and student/teacher ratios; encouraging regular staff development and in-service training for certified teachers; and including systematic evaluation and monitoring.

Assessment and Differentiated Instruction

A recent Evidence-Based Practice Guide has been released by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences' *What Works Clearinghouse*, that recommends a multi-tiered approach for identifying and assisting students struggling with reading in the primary grades.⁶⁴ The research evidence presented in this report recommends a **Response to Intervention (RtI)** approach that is comprehensive, incorporates early detection and serves as a preventative strategy that identifies struggling students and assists them before they fall behind. Intrinsic to this approach is the combination of universal screening and high quality instruction for all students, with interventions targeted at struggling students. The following recommendations have been proposed based on a review of the research:

1. **Screen** all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year. Regularly monitor the progress of students who are at elevated risk for developing reading disabilities.
2. Provide **differentiated reading instruction** for all students based on assessments of students' current reading levels (tier 1).
3. Provide **intensive, systematic instruction** on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark on universal screening. Typically these groups meet between three and five times a week for 20–40 minutes (tier 2).
4. **Monitor the progress** of tier 2 students at least once a month. Use these data to determine whether students still require intervention. For those still making insufficient progress, school-wide teams should design a tier 3 intervention plan.
5. **Provide intensive instruction daily** that promotes the development of various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in tier 2 small group instruction (tier 3).

Implementation checklists, recommended target areas for early screening and progress monitoring, a list of foundational reading skills, progress monitoring measures, and a brief review of the evidence can be found at

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/rti_reading_pg_021809.pdf.

"There is no silver bullet so get on with it and just do the work"

Early Literacy Consultant, Vancouver School Board

Literacy Methods and Strategies

As the above quote aptly describes, there is no one perfect way to teach children to read. Two major and divergent theories of literacy teaching are skills or code-based methods versus whole-language or meaning-based methods.^{65,66} Skills-based learning reflects the idea that discrete components of reading can be taught using direct instruction of phonics, phonological awareness, letter-strings and sound blending. The teacher provides systematic step-by-step instruction, review, guided practice, feedback and corrective action at the reader's appropriate level. The whole-language approach, on the other hand, represents a constructivist view where the learner is influenced by their complex environment. Whole-language teaching focuses on determining the meaning of the text, where literacy is viewed as a natural process where the reader actively creates understanding by engaging in authentic and meaningful reading activities. The current consensus on the best approach to use for effective literacy is a combination of both skills-based and whole-language approaches for teaching children both how to read and to enjoy reading.^{67,68}

However, for children at-risk who have not had opportunities for home language and literacy experiences such as reading with caregivers and parental modeling, direct instruction or explicit teaching in kindergarten and grade 1 becomes important. According to Rowe (2006) "For children from disadvantaged backgrounds who often do not have rich phonological knowledge and phonemic awareness upon which to base new learning, being taught under constructivist modes has the effect of compounding their disadvantage once they begin school".⁶⁹

Machin and McNally (2008)⁷⁰ explored the effects of a direct instruction program called *The Literacy hour* introduced in 400 schools in England. Using a treatment-control group comparison, pupil achievement was compared across those schools which used the Literacy hour to those not subjected to the program. Eighty percent of the schools using the program were located in inner city urban areas where the most disadvantaged and poorly performing schools in England were concentrated. The program consisted of '**structured teaching**' (e.g. making clear what has to be learnt; dividing material into manageable units; teaching in a well-considered sequence) and '**effective learning time**'. Specifically, the daily literacy hour consisted of 10–15 minutes of whole-class reading or writing; 10–15 minutes whole-class session on word work (phonics, spelling and vocabulary) and sentence work (grammar and punctuation); 25–30 minutes of directed group activities (on aspects of writing or reading); and a plenary session at the end for pupils to revisit the objectives of the lesson, reflect on what they have learnt and consider what they need to do next. The evaluation results indicated significant improvements in basic literacy

skills of those children exposed to the Literacy hour, with larger gains identified for boys than for girls and a cost benefit analyses supporting the value of the program.

Similar results for the effectiveness of the Literacy hour have been reported by the National Foundation for Educational Research ⁷¹ using data from 250 schools. These results revealed a significant and substantial improvement in test scores improved by approximately six standardized score points for grades 3-6 pupils, equivalent to 8 to 12 months progress over and above what is expected in these ages. In this study, girls had higher average scores than boys and made more progress during the project. Children at-risk (e.g., those eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language) also made statistically significant progress as did children from different ethnic groups. Thus, 'structured teaching' (e.g. making clear what has to be learnt; dividing material into manageable units; teaching in a well-considered sequence) and 'effective learning time' are two important factors for effective literacy teaching for children at risk.^{72,73}

Concern has been expressed that simply using direct instruction inhibits student's comprehension and engagement. Knapp and Needles⁷⁴ in their review of research on curriculum and instruction in literacy for children of poverty, recommend the following to address these issues:

- Active, comprehension-focused curricula that emphasize meaning from the earliest stages.
- Exposure to a wide variety of text, with less (or no) use of phonetically controlled or vocabulary basal readers.
- Instruction in which students are a resource for one another's learning, for example as reading partners or as group critics or facilitators in 'reciprocal teaching' approaches.
- Instruction in which teachers play an active role, as in direct instruction models, but with greater emphasis on explicit teaching of comprehension strategies.
- Learning activities that place reading in the context of a real task or application, thus providing the student with a compelling reason to read (p. IV-14).

Other teacher recommendations for helping at-risk students reading comes from a study of effective schools in low SES areas in the United States for children in grades 1-3. ⁷⁵ These included the following teacher factors:

- Promoting home communication using calls, notes and handout about classroom activities
- Maintaining student engagement using different activities and environments
- More time spent in small group instruction (60 minutes per day)
- Time spent in independent reading (28 minutes per day)
- Coaching in word recognition instruction while students worked at sounding words out

The research suggests that a wide variety of materials, methods, philosophical positions and strategies are important for teaching literacy to children in disadvantaged areas.^{76,77} Methods which match instructional approaches to diagnosed student need in a systematically organized way requires continuous assessment and differentiated instruction by ability level. As well, the efficacy of early literacy instruction and a child-centered focus which incorporates sociocultural considerations is important. Finally, instruction which maintains student engagement and interest and incorporates family involvement is key to developing a child who enjoys reading.

Evidence-based Effective Literacy Programs

Along with skills-based and whole-language methods for teaching children to read, programs have been developed for teaching specific skills, content or populations. Luckily for busy teachers and school administrators, national organizations have taken on the role of evaluating best practices and providing systematic evidence-based reviews of educational programming. Most notably is the *What Works Clearinghouse* (WWC; see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. Amongst other topics, The WWC evaluates beginning reading interventions and instructional strategies for students in grades K-3. The WWC reviews each study that passes eligibility screens to determine whether the study provides strong evidence (*Meets Evidence Standards*), weaker evidence (*Meets Evidence Standards with Reservations*), or insufficient evidence (*Does Not Meet Evidence Standards*) for an intervention's effectiveness. Currently, only well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and regression discontinuity studies that provide the strongest evidence of causal validity are considered *Meeting Evidence Standard*. Those studies which *Meets Evidence Standards with Reservations* include all quasi-experimental studies with no design flaws and randomized controlled trials that have problems with randomization, attrition, or disruption. Studies that do not provide strong evidence of causal validity are identified as *Not Meeting Evidence Screens*.


WWC's focus for beginning reading interventions and instructional strategies fall into 4 categories - those that increase skills in: 1) **alphabetic**s (phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, letter recognition, print awareness and phonics); 2) **reading fluency**; 3) **comprehension** (vocabulary and reading comprehension); or 4) **general reading achievement**. Systematic reviews of evidence in this topic area address the following questions: 1) Which interventions intended to provide basic literacy instruction improve reading skills (including alphabetic, fluency, comprehension or general reading achievement) among students in grades K-3 or ages 5-8?; 2) Are some interventions more effective than others at improving certain types of reading

skills?; and 3) Are some interventions more effective for certain types of students, particularly students who have historically lagged behind in reading achievement?

Individual intervention-level reports are released on a periodic basis. *The Beginning Reading Evidence Report* focused on a 22-year span, from 1983 to 2005 (with a few 2006 studies added during the report-writing stage, when developers submitted recently completed research). WWC looked at 887 studies of 153 programs that qualified for their review of interventions and strategies for increasing skills in alphabets, reading fluency, comprehension, and general reading achievement. Of these, 51 studies of 24 programs met their evidence standards, 27 without reservations and 24 with reservations. The remaining 129 programs had no studies that met the WWC evidence screens. Of these, 92 programs had one or more studies that were reviewed and did not meet WWC evidence screens. Thirty-seven programs did not have any outcomes studies. In looking at the four outcome domains for the 24 interventions, 10 interventions had positive effects or potentially positive effects in all the outcome domains addressed in their studies.

The following lists the top 5 programs identified by *the What Works Clearinghouse* as effective for children at-risk in elementary school for each category. The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention and the average percentile rank of the student in the comparison group. It can take on the values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group. The evidence rating considers 4 factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of difference between participants in the intervention and comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies. Two pluses = Positive Effects: strong evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence; One Plus = Potentially Positive Effects: evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence; One plus and one minus = Mixed Effects: evidence of inconsistent effects. Extent of evidence is developed to convey how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating; focusing on the number and sizes of studies. This scheme has two categories: small and medium to large. The following tables present the most effective interventions for each category for children at-risk in elementary grades.

Table 1. WWC's Results for Alphabets (phonemic awareness, letter Identification, print awareness, phonics).

Intervention ▲	Improvement Index ↓	Evidence Rating ▲	Extent Of Evidence ▲
Early Intervention in Reading (EIR)®		+	Small

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<u>Reading Recovery®</u>		34	++	Medium to Large
<u>Stepping Stones to Literacy</u>		30	++	Small
<u>Earobics®</u>		25	++	Small
<u>DaisyQuest</u>		23	++	Small

Table 2. WWC's Results for Comprehension (vocabulary development, reading comprehension).






<u>Kaplan SpellRead</u>		20	+	Small
<u>Early Intervention in Reading (EIR)®</u>		18	+	Small
<u>Reading Recovery®</u>		14	+	Small
<u>Start Making a Reader Today® (SMART®)</u>		14	+	Small
<u>Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)©</u>		13	+	Small

Table 3. WWC's Results for Fluency (the ability to read text accurately, automatically, and with expression, while still extracting meaning from it).







<u>Reading Recovery®</u>		46	+	Small
<u>Start Making a Reader Today® (SMART®)</u>		17	+	Small
<u>Earobics®</u>		15	+	Small
<u>Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)©</u>		13	+	Small
<u>Kaplan SpellRead</u>		9	+	Small

Table 4. WWC's Results for General reading achievement-Outcomes that fall in the general reading achievement domain are those that either combine two or more of the previous domains (alphabetic, reading fluency, and comprehension) or provide some other type of summary score, such as a "total reading score" on a standardized reading tests, grades in reading or language arts class, or promotion to the next grade.

<u>Intervention</u> ▲	<u>Improvement Index</u> ↓	<u>Evidence Rating</u> ▲	<u>Extent Of Evidence</u> ▲	
<u>Reading Recovery®</u>		32	++	Medium to Large

The following are details of each program identified above based on WWC's website (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/Topic.aspx?tid=01>).

Reading Recovery. *Reading Recovery*[®] is a short-term tutoring intervention intended to serve the lowest-achieving (bottom 20%) first-grade students. The goals of *Reading Recovery*[®] are to promote literacy skills, reduce the number of first-grade students who are struggling to read, and prevent long-term reading difficulties. *Reading Recovery*[®] supplements classroom teaching with one-to-one tutoring sessions, generally conducted as pull-out sessions during the school day. Tutoring, which is conducted by trained *Reading Recovery*[®] teachers, takes place daily for 30 minutes over 12–20 weeks. Four studies of *Reading Recovery*[®] meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards, and one study meets WWC evidence standards with reservations. The five studies included approximately 700 first-grade students in more than 46 schools across the United States. Based on these five studies, the WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Reading Recovery*[®] to be medium to large for alphabets, small for fluency and comprehension, and medium to large for general reading achievement. *Reading Recovery*[®] was found to have positive effects on alphabets and general reading achievement and potentially positive effects on fluency and comprehension.

Stepping Stones to Literacy (SSL). SSL is a supplemental curriculum designed to promote listening, print conventions, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and serial processing/rapid naming (quickly naming familiar visual symbols and stimuli such as letters or colors). The program targets kindergarten and older preschool students considered to be underachieving readers, based on teacher's recommendations, assessments, and systematic screening. Students participate in 10- to 20-minute daily lessons in a small group or individually. The curriculum consists of 25 lessons, for a total of 9–15 hours of instructional time. Two studies of *Stepping Stones to Literacy* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The two studies included 120 kindergarten students in 17 elementary schools in the Midwest. The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Stepping Stones to Literacy* to be small for alphabets. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed fluency, comprehension, or general reading achievement. *Stepping Stones to Literacy* was found to have positive effects on student outcomes in the alphabets domain.

PALS. *Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)* is a peer-tutoring program. According to the developer's website, it is designed to be incorporated into the existing curriculum with the goal of improving the academic performance of children with diverse academic needs. Teachers train students to use *PALS* procedures. Students partner with peers, alternating the role of tutor while reading aloud, listening, and providing feedback in various structured activities. *PALS* is typically implemented three times a week for 30 to 35 minutes. Although *PALS* can be used in different subject areas and grade levels, this intervention report focuses on the use of *PALS* to improve reading skills of students in kindergarten through third grade. Four studies of *Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. The four studies included more than 360 students from first to third grades in the United States. The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *PALS* to be small for alphabets, fluency, and comprehension. The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *PALS* to be medium to large for alphabets and small for fluency and comprehension. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed general reading achievement. *PALS* was found to have potentially positive effects on alphabets, fluency, and comprehension.

Early Intervention in Reading (EIR)[®] is a program designed to provide extra instruction to groups of students at risk of failing to learn to read. The program uses picture books to stress instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and contextual analysis, along with repeated reading and writing. In grades K, 1, and 2, the program is based on whole-class instruction, with additional small group instruction provided to struggling readers. In grades 3 and 4, the program consists of small group instruction for 20 minutes, four days a week. Teachers are trained for nine months using workshops and an Internet-based professional development program. One study of *EIR*[®] meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. That study included 12 teachers and 59 students in first grade from one Midwestern state. Based on this one study, the WWC considers the extent of evidence for *EIR*[®] to be small for alphabets and comprehension. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations examined the effectiveness of *EIR*[®] in the fluency or general reading achievement domains. *EIR*[®] was found to have potentially positive effects on alphabets and comprehension.

Start Making a Reader Today[®] (SMART[®]) is a volunteer tutoring program widely implemented in Oregon for students in grades K–2 who are at risk of reading failure. The program is designed to be a low-cost, easy-to-implement intervention. Volunteer tutors go into schools where at least 40% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and read one-on-one with students twice a week for half an hour. Typically, one volunteer works with two children on four types of activities: reading to the child, reading with the child, re-reading with the child, and asking the child questions about what has been read. The program also gives each student two new books a month to encourage families to read together. One study of *SMART*[®] met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The one study included more than 125 students in first grade in six schools across four school districts in Oregon.¹ The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *SMART*[®] to be small for alphabets, fluency, and comprehension. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed general reading achievement. *Start Making a Reader Today*[®] was found to have potentially positive effects on alphabets, fluency, and comprehension.

DaisyQuest is a software bundle that offers computer-assisted instruction in phonological awareness, targeting children aged three to seven years. The instructional activities, framed in a fairy tale involving a search for a friendly dragon named Daisy, teach children how to recognize words that rhyme; words that have the same beginning, middle, and ending sounds; and words that can be formed from a series of phonemes presented separately, as well as how to count the number of sounds in words. Four studies met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The studies included a total of 223 students ranging in age from five to seven years, attending schools in different communities and states, including one western and one southeastern state. The studies examined *DaisyQuest*'s effects in the alphabets domain, specifically on phonological awareness and phonics measures. *DaisyQuest* was found to have positive effects on alphabets skills.

Kaplan SpellRead (formerly known as *SpellRead Phonological Auditory Training*[®]) is a literacy program for struggling readers in grades 2 or above, including special education students, English language learners, and students more than two years below grade level in reading. *Kaplan SpellRead* integrates the auditory and visual aspects of the reading process and emphasizes specific skill mastery through systematic and explicit instruction. The program takes five to nine months to complete and consists of 140 lessons divided into three phases. Two studies of *Kaplan SpellRead* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The two studies included 208 students from first to third grades in Pennsylvania and in Newfoundland, Canada. The WWC considers the extent of

evidence for *Kaplan SpellRead* to be small for alphabetics, fluency, and comprehension. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed general reading achievement. *Kaplan SpellRead* was found to have positive effects on alphabetics and potentially positive effects on fluency and comprehension.

Other Literacy Programs used in the Inner City Schools

The following descriptions of developed programs were not identified in the top 5 by WWC but are used in the Inner City Schools.

LIPS- The *Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing (LiPS)*[®] program (formerly called the *Auditory Discrimination in Depth*[®] [ADD] program) is designed to teach students skills to decode words and to identify individual sounds and blends in words. Initial activities engage students in discovering the lip, tongue, and mouth actions needed to produce specific sounds. After students are able to produce, label, and organize the sounds, subsequent activities in sequencing, reading, and spelling use the oral aspects of sounds to identify and order them within words. The program also offers direct instruction in letter patterns, sight words, and context clues in reading. The *LiPS*[®] program is individualized to meet students' needs and is often used with students who have learning disabilities or reading difficulties. The version of the program tested here involved computer-supported activities. One study of *LiPS*[®] meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The study included 150 first-grade students in five elementary schools. The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *LiPS*[®] to be small for alphabetics and comprehension. No studies that meet WWC standards with or without reservations addressed fluency or general reading achievement. Based on one study, *LiPS*[®] was found to have potentially positive effects on alphabetics and no discernible effects on comprehension. Findings on fluency and general reading achievement were not reported in the study.

Read Well is a research-based reading curriculum designed to improve student literacy. This program includes explicit, systematic instruction in English decoding, sustained practice of decoding skills and fluency, and instruction in vocabulary and concepts presented in text. It also provides support for English language learner (ELL) students through scaffolded lesson instruction and oral language priming activities. One study of *Read Well* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. This study, which included more than 30 ELL elementary school students from five schools in central Texas, examined results on students' reading achievement. *Read Well* was found to have potentially positive effects on reading achievement of elementary school English language learners.

As the above descriptions indicate, the different literacy programs use a variety of methods (e.g., one-on-one tutoring, peer mentoring, computer assisted, picture books, volunteer tutoring), have different program lengths and target various populations. The advantage of a site like *What Works Clearinghouse* is the ease at identifying programs which are proven effective and allow choice in matching the school's resources or needs. At present, the top choice for addressing the greatest number of beginning reading skills, for both students at and not at-risk is *Reading Recovery*[®] based on the extent of evidence, evidence ratings and type of skill.

Literacy for English Learners

Another relevant concern for the Inner City School Project is effective literacy instruction for those students whose mother language is not English. The Institute of Education Sciences has also developed a practice guide entitled *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide*⁷⁸ (NCEE 2007-4011; see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/20074011.pdf>). The goal of this practice guide is to formulate specific and coherent evidence-based recommendations for effective literacy instruction for English learners in the elementary grades. The panel of experts has suggested the following recommendations:

- 1. Assess measures of phonological processing, letter knowledge, and word and text reading.** Use these data to identify English learners who require additional instructional support and to monitor their reading progress over time.
- 2. Provide focused, intensive small-group interventions for English learners determined to be at risk for reading problems.** Although the amount of time in small-group instruction and the intensity of this instruction should reflect the degree of risk, determined by reading assessment data and other indicators, the interventions should include the five core reading elements (phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Explicit, direct instruction should be the primary means of instructional delivery.
- 3. Provide high-quality vocabulary instruction throughout the day.** Teach essential content words in depth. In addition, use instructional time to address the meanings of common words, phrases, and expressions not yet learned.
- 4. Ensure that the development of formal or academic English is a key instructional goal for English learners, beginning in the primary grades.** Provide curricula and supplemental curricula to accompany core reading and mathematics series to support this goal. Accompany with relevant training and professional development.
- 5. Ensure that teachers of English learners devote approximately 90 minutes a week to instructional activities in which pairs of students at different ability levels or different English language proficiencies work together on academic tasks in a structured fashion.** These activities should practice and extend material already taught.

Once again, details of the research, checklists for implementation and indicators of evidence strength are provided in the practice guide.

Successful Approaches to Promoting Literacy and Recommendations from the Inner City Schools' Teachers and Supporting Staff

A focus group on literacy was conducted with 16 participants representing all 12 Inner City Schools. The participants included: five Project Teachers, three Teachers, two Literacy Coaches, four Resource Teachers, one Principal and one Teacher-Librarian. Table 5

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summarizes their responses on which programs are considered most successful, why they are successful and the evidence identifying its success.

Table 5. Focus group results from staff of successful programs for improving literacy in the Inner City Schools.

PROGRAM	Why Successful?	How do we know?
Small group guided instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students taste success everyday • Working at instructional level • Frequent monitoring and frequent feedback (daily assessment) • Flexible grouping and movement • Instructor communication – weekly meetings • Targeted instruction • Teacher training and commitment - mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress observed • Direct instruction program at intermediate level no longer needed and decreased need at primary level • Kids are engaged in reading during independent times
Reading Mastery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical, repetitive • Each child must respond • 90% success for each child • Increases enthusiasm for reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Ks are reading and writing by end of the year except Ds • Ready to do grade level work
Early Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with Ks and Ones that are struggling • Small group instruction • Individualized, based on assessment • Hands-on, manipulating text and letters • Frequent (3-4 times a week) • Flexible in meeting needs of all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 2s are all reading and are ready for participating in reading instruction
Reading Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured but not scripted • Meets needs of individual child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures success for child • Reads at grade level by end of program (20 weeks) or gets referred for further intervention • Daily • Regular review of progress
Literacy Innovation Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student engagement and evident progress

As indicated in Table 5, staff at the Inner City schools identified early intervention and small group pull out instruction as important practices for these young children at-risk. Key features include flexibility, frequent assessment and monitoring, child-based individualized and ability-level

instruction and frequent application. Three major programs are being used to supplement these practices: *Reading Recovery*, *Reading Mastery* and *Literacy Innovation Project*. However, as Appendix B (a review of the programs used across the 12 schools) indicates, only 2 schools were using *Reading Recovery*, 3 schools using *Reading Mastery* and 5 schools using *Literacy Innovation Project* (a Ministry of Education, VSB designed program) in 2008. Overall, the 12 Inner City Schools are using 54 different methods for promoting literacy.

The focus group also provided a list of recommendations for further promoting literacy instruction in their schools (see below).

Recommendations for improving outcomes for literacy for vulnerable children (not prioritized)

- o More Reading Recovery time in schools
- o More opportunities for reading at their level
- o Include more volunteers or staff
- o Library time restored to schools
- o Up to date technology and training
- o More support for “at risk” students (SSWs?)
- o More psych assessment and speech pathology assessment
- o Early identification and support for Kindergarten kids (testing, support speech pathologist)
- o Smaller class sizes
- o TOCs and support staff assigned to Inner City schools to carry on programs consistently
- o Resource teachers to receive a TOC immediately
- o Encourage more parent involvement by offering food or a draw to parent programs
- o Flexible hours for teachers to work with parents and families
- o ESL students receiving at least 7 years of service
- o Annexes need same support as main schools for project teachers in Literacy, Principal/VP teaching time
- o and support for students from different cultures
- o More professional and trained adults in classroom
- o Psychologists to assess K-3 students - don't have true assessments or tools
- o Address safety concerns
- o Quality reading instruction in teacher training
- o Opportunities for teachers to dialogue with colleagues, teacher collaboration and Pro D to support teacher growth
- o Professional development within schools and outside schools sharing with staff time dedicated to support this process
- o Advocacy for students living in poverty
- o Morning programs, hot lunch, Parent/Tot programs
- o Sharing what works in programs and practices
- o Early intervention – Jr. K
- o School-based day-care so school becomes the heart of the Inner City community
- o K program with strong literacy focus and support for teachers
- o Reading Recovery for struggling Grade 1s.

- o Immediate sharing of information when students transition in to a school
- o More time for teacher training
- o Study groups, specialty training, like Orton Gillingham, Reading Recovery
- o Library time is essential
- o Literacy coaches in every school to support daily professional learning on site
- o District wide Junior Kindergarten
- o More quality literacy materials- updated texts that appeal to students
- o Increased teacher-librarian time and resources

- o Streamlined, effective initiatives to engage families
- o Flexible school year and times – adjusting school calendars to meet student needs (year-round schooling and later start in the day)
- o Middle schools and/ or bridging programs (kids feel disconnected to high schools programs and staff)
- o Alternative status or some way that staff working at inner city schools are highly trained

As the school staff focus group recommendations indicate, the majority relate to whole-school and school district change initiatives. These include: the need for addition training and professional development; greater information sharing; earlier assessment and intervention support; greater human resources such as literacy coaches, librarians, and access to psychological assessments and speech pathologists; more material resources such as texts; flexible working hours; and, greater opportunities to connect with families and community.

As well, a key informant interview was conducted with an Early Literacy Consultant responsible for programming at the school district level and who had worked extensively in the Inner City Schools.

VSB Key Informant Interview

Early Literacy Consultant

Early intervention project. Started with a group of teachers who wanted to see change. Looked at the Peter Hill model and what needs to be in place. Michael Fullan. P. Hill, "Breakthrough"- Nuclear- middle= moral purpose (what we are doing and why). Then outside- professional learning, precision (how to explicitly teach it), personalization (teachers to the learners). Next layer- assessment, school and classroom organization, classroom teaching, professional learning communities, intervention and assistance, home school and community partnerships. Whole band- leadership and coordination. York district in Ontario- what is common in most successful schools?.

The following were done in 8 schools and were very successful.

1. Shared beliefs and understanding (teacher, leadership, community)
2. Embedded teacher leadership (someone in school who is passionate, vision has respect of teachers to move school forward- e.g., social responsibility) to steer a course

3. Principal support and leaderships- support teachers and have the big vision with time and energy (e.g., Power hour).
4. Literacy blocks (8 am till recess, then writing- dedicated time)
5. Full implementation of early intervention
6. Case management approach- team approach all working for the good of all the students with dedicated support. Not compartmentalized, e.g. ESL. CSNs
7. Professional learning around literacy- professional development days, book studies.
8. In school meeting and on-going conversations- must provide a space for this.
9. Use of instructional text- assessment tools, what level so that every child can have a book
10. Allocation of school budget for reading material (group decides how to spend their literacy money- little library/staff room signed out). Enough materials for everyone.
11. Action-research focused on literacy.
12. Parent involvement (every Tues. parents would come in to read with groups of kids, home reading- read book with parents- gets stars- could read book independently. Parent nights- talk about coding strategies- understand /use same
13. Cross-curricular literacy- so we are not teaching in isolation (to have literacy meeting. Book clubs).

Literacy Pilot Project

1. **Gradual release of responsibility model**

Teacher models it. Do it together with a group. Shared- teacher is still in charge- guided practice- children are mainly responsible (recording, reading), independent

2. **Differentiated instruction**- read aloud- heterogeneous group. Guided reading by level- no more than 6 children reading at their ZPD- as they read give 1-1 (graphic organizers- will send). (guided) homogeneous groups- teacher reaching ZPD

3. **Pair-share- sharing out**. Oral language (many ESL students) need to promote oral language. Teacher asks a question- put in pairs and share with each other. Then share back with the full group.

Then about 20% kids need more help/support through the resource centre- the groups vary according to ability.

Kindergarten teacher **screens** in Jan. (letter sound, sampling of oral language, concepts of print, phonological awareness). **Students who are struggling get small group pull-out**. Then they are re-assessed in June. If still having problems in grade 1- then they get Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery program. Teachers who want to become reading recovery teachers- 1 year training. Still in a group and meet once a month. 20-30 out there plus training more (10+). Trying to get UBC to teach program. Train the trainer program. Funding- 11 schools have it but more have trained teachers and want the additional support. Statistics show that it is the most effective way of teaching literacy to that 15 %. Work 1-1- intensively with 4 students 4-5 days a week. Learn their strengths. Once a month, the teachers come together and get training behind glass. Very in depth.

Early intervention school gets additional funding- reading recovery 1-1-support.

Evidence-based Whole School/School District Approaches to Promoting Literacy

The recommendations from both the focus group and the key informant interview are supported and consistent with the research on best practices for promoting literacy for schools and school districts in disadvantaged areas.^{79, 80, 81} Much of this work has come from studies examining the practices of schools with high literacy levels compared to those which have lower rates. Two examples are provided for comparison. First, Taylor and colleagues found in their study of schools with high literacy levels in low SES areas in the United States for children in grades 1-3,⁸² the following were important school factors:

- **Building Communication** within and across grades include: teaming, peer coaching, program consistency, and seeing all children as everyone's responsibility.
- **Systematic Evaluation of Student Progress** where children were regularly assessed, assessment data was shared, and instructional decisions were made based on assessment information.
- **Research-based Early Reading Interventions** with small group interventions in grades K-3.
- **Ongoing Professional Development** including year-long workshops or district-sponsored graduate-level courses related to early reading intervention.
- **School Organization for Reading Instruction** which was a collaborative model involving regular teachers, reading resource, and special education teachers who worked together to provide small group instruction. Resource teachers came into the classroom for 60 minutes a day. In 1 school, children went to resource teachers to work in groups of 2 or 3 for 45 minutes a day.
- **Reaching Out to Parents** through focus groups, written or phone surveys, and having an active site council on which parents served.

In the second example, Grant and colleagues⁸³ in Southern Australia, identified the following characteristics of effective schools that excel in literacy for disadvantaged areas:

1) 'Energizing beliefs' where:

- Teachers are the key to making a difference to student learning outcomes
- Students have the potential to learn
- The primary function of leadership in the school is to sustain teachers in their efforts to support student learning in literacy and numeracy
- School leadership is a responsibility of many staff members in the school
- School leaders need to build on teachers' expertise and sense of efficacy
- Literacy and numeracy are complex sets of social practices.

2) Building and sustaining a 'community of experts' who have an understandings

about difference and diversity, understanding student achievement requires multiple perspectives and building and sustaining a 'community of experts'. Support for the community of experts included:

- Targeting professional development

- Translating professional development into the classroom context
- Developing sustained professional development
- Valuing professional development
- Taking on the belief of teachers as learners.

3) Establishing a whole school commitment and focus

- Identifying a specific focus for literacy and/or numeracy
- Managing the curriculum
- Setting up whole school structures
- Allocating resources
- Agreeing on priorities for professional development.

4) Reducing the risk of schooling

- Working the classroom as a cultural site
- Providing a wide/narrow curriculum
- Knowing each student

5) Reviewing – ‘Keeping a finger on the pulse’

- Being accountable
- Monitoring ‘how we are going’
- Identifying the focus for action.

Recommendations for Promoting Literacy in the Inner City Schools

The research evidence for promoting literacy for children at-risk overwhelmingly recommends that instructional approaches need to be systematically organized in response to diagnosed student need. This entails that regular screening be used to identify need and to inform instruction. Current best practices recommend a *Response to Intervention (RtI)* approach that is comprehensive, incorporates early detection and serves as a preventative strategy that identifies struggling students and assists them before they fall behind. The research also shows that early intervention is very effective for this population and works best with small groups or one-on-one instruction. Literacy programs should include a variety of approaches, be culturally and developmentally appropriate for the ability level and include dedicated time for instruction. Finally, a holistic approach is required that: a) considers the social-emotional influence on school achievement; b) addresses family needs (e.g., family literacy); c) utilizes community programs and services that support literacy; and, d) addresses the needs of the child (sense of belonging, is enjoyable/fun, is applicable to their life). An excellent tool for examining and developing a school-wide literacy program was developed by Grant and colleagues⁸⁴ and can be found at <http://www.thenetwork.sa.edu.au/files/pages/nltc/Survey/index.htm>.

In reviewing the current status of literacy programming in the Inner City Schools, it is clear that many of these recommendations are already taking place. What the research shows and what has been recommended as further steps by teachers and support workers in the schools is that a

more cohesive **'Inner City School Literacy Plan'** would be beneficial. Important elements of this plan would include the following:

- An emphasis on early intervention programming
- A multi-tiered approach to identifying and addressing ability level needs
- A collaborative model that supports integrated literacy activity of different roles within schools, in relation to assessment, instruction and evaluation
- District wide support of programs that are evidence based in relation to training, financial and human support and professional development
- Opportunities for networking across all inner city schools
- Continued support for encouraging family involvement
- A coordinated plan for involving community in supporting literacy initiatives during out-of-school hours.

PROMOTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The second foundational goal of the Inner City Schools is the promotion of social-emotional development. This section will describe the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) for vulnerable children and their schools, the important factors for developing a safe and caring environment, the research describing the best programming and implementation for promoting SEL and the current successful strategies and suggestions for future action from staff, parents and students in the Inner City Schools.

"Students can't learn if they don't feel safe and cared for"

Teacher, Vancouver School Board

Definition of SEL and its Importance for Vulnerable Children

Social-emotional learning is particularly important for vulnerable children. As Evans (2004)¹ describes, the psychosocial environment of children living in poverty differs from middle-income children. They are more likely to be exposed to greater levels of violence, family disruption, separation from their family, neighbourhood crime and aggressive peers. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "SEL is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively and ethically" (see <http://www.casel.org/basics/definition.php>).

On an individual level, research has shown that SEL is not only fundamental to children's social and emotional development but also their health, ethical development, citizenship, academic

learning, and motivation to achieve. For example, Guerra and Bradshaw (2008)⁸⁵ found that SEL increases a student's positive sense of self, self control, decision-making skills, moral system of belief, and prosocial connectedness. Emotional disturbances such as anxiety, if not addressed, can result in poor social and coping skills, reduced social interactions, low self-esteem and lower academic achievement.^{86, 87} Left unaddressed, anxiety has been shown to have long term effects such as reduced career choices, increased medical use, depression and substance abuse in adulthood.⁸⁸ As well, peer rejection has been associated with internalizing and externalizing problems, academic problems and school drop-out.⁸⁹

At the school-level, SEL has also shown to have positive effects. Weissberg, Durlak, Taylor and O'Brien (2007)⁹⁰ found in their meta-analysis that students with SEL in schools had a 15 percentile increase in achievement tests, significantly better attendance records, more constructive classroom behavior, liked school better, had better grade point averages and were less likely to be suspended. This research confirms the impact of SEL on academic achievement.^{91, 92}

There are also benefits to addressing social emotional development from a societal perspective. As Hymel et al.⁹³ warns, "we pay now or pay later" (p.8). Cost-benefit analyses conducted by Cohen in 1998⁹⁴ estimates that each high risk youth who becomes a career criminal costs the United States up to 1.5 million dollars in lost wages, medical costs, stolen property, incarceration and justice system costs. Peplar and Craig (2008)⁹⁵ estimate that the cost of relationship violence to Canadian society is over 9 billion dollars annually.

Considerations for an Effective SEL Program

Social and emotional education is a unifying concept for organizing and coordinating school-based programming that focuses on positive youth development, health promotion, prevention of problem behaviors, and student engagement in learning. According to CASEL (2007), effective SEL programs require a safe and caring environment and social emotional competency instruction that addresses self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision-making.⁹⁶

In order to develop a safe and caring environment, Jennings and Greenberg (2009)⁹⁷ propose the need to first ensure teachers' sense of self competence and well-being. These authors suggest that teachers with high social emotional competence will enhance healthier student-teacher

relationships (e.g., understanding, empathetic), demonstrate more effective classroom management (e.g., more proactive, supportive) and will implement a more effective social emotional curriculum. The seminal study by Battistich et al. (1997), described earlier, highlights the importance of teacher attitude and practices on students' social emotional development. The authors recommend that teachers be provided the opportunity to participate in course work such as awareness training and mindfulness (*Cultivating Emotional Balance Training*⁹⁸, *Emotionally Intelligent Teacher Training*⁹⁹ or *The Courage to Teach*¹⁰⁰) for improving teachers' social emotional competencies and thus, by extension, students' SEL.

Once a climate that is safe and caring is established, the research suggests that effective SEL programming has the following characteristics (CASEL, 2003)¹⁰¹ :

- Grounded in theory and research
- Teaches children to apply SEL skills and ethical values in daily life
- Builds connection to school through caring, engaging classroom and school practice
- Provides developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction
- Helps schools coordinate and unify programs that are often fragmented
- Enhances school performance by addressing the affective and social dimensions of academic learning
- Involves families and communities as partners
- Establishes organizational supports and policies that foster success
- Provides high-quality staff development and support
- Incorporates continuing evaluation and improvement

Theory-based Developmentally Appropriate SEL Programming

Two major developmental theories are applicable to this discussion. The first is Erikson's *Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development*. According to Erikson, the socialization process consists of eight phases which arises and demands resolution before the next stage can be satisfactorily negotiated. Learning and resolution of each crisis is necessary if the child is to manage the next and subsequent ones satisfactorily.

Erikson's Eight Stages of Development include:

1. Basic Trust Versus Basic Mistrust (Hope)

Chronologically, this is the period of infancy through to 18 months. The child who is nurtured and loved will develop trust and security and a basic optimism. If not, the child becomes insecure and mistrustful.

2. Autonomy Versus Shame (Will)

The second psychosocial crisis, Erikson believes occurs during early childhood (between about 18 months and up to 3 years of age). The child's energies are directed toward the development of physical skills, including walking, grasping, controlling the sphincter. If the child does not learn control, shame may arise.

3. **Initiative Versus Guilt** (Purpose)

Erikson believes that this third psychosocial crisis occurs during what he calls the "play age," or the later preschool years (from about 3-6 years). The healthily developing child learns: (1) to imagine, to broaden his skills through active play of all sorts, including fantasy (2) to cooperate with others (3) to lead as well as to follow. Immobilized by guilt, he is: (1) fearful (2) hangs on the fringes of groups (3) continues to depend unduly on adults and (4) is restricted both in the development of play skills and in imagination.

4. **Industry Versus Inferiority** (Competence)

Erikson believes that the fourth psychosocial crisis is handled, for better or worse, during what he calls the "school age," (6-12 years). Here the child learns to master the more formal skills of life: (1) relating with peers according to rules (2) progressing from free play to play that may be elaborately structured by rules and may demand formal teamwork, such as organized sports and (3) school work. The child must deal with these new demands or risk a sense of inferiority, failure or incompetence.

5. **Identity Versus Identity Diffusion** (Fidelity)

During the fifth psychosocial crisis (adolescence, from about 13 or 14 to about 20) the child strives to achieve a sense of identity in occupation, gender roles, and socialization. The adolescent seeks leadership (someone to inspire him), and gradually develops a set of ideals (socially congruent and desirable, in the case of the successful adolescent). Erikson believes that, in our culture, adolescence affords a "psychosocial moratorium," particularly for middle - and upper-class American children. They do not yet have to "play for keeps," but can experiment, trying various roles, and thus hopefully find the one most suitable for them.

6. **Intimacy Versus Isolation** (Love)

The successful young adult must develop intimate relationships or suffer feelings of isolation.

7. **Generativity Versus Self-Absorption** (Care)

In middle adulthood, the psychosocial crisis demands generativity; working productively and creatively. Important events include parenting/mentoring.

8. **Integrity Versus Despair** (Wisdom)

If the other seven psychosocial crisis have been successfully resolved, the mature adult develops a sense of acceptance of themselves as one is and experience a sense of fulfillment.

The other major developmental theory that is applicable to SEL is Kohlberg's *Theory of Moral Development* which includes three levels:

1) a **Preconventional level** where judgments are based on personal needs and others' rules. Stage 1 is punishment-obedience orientation where rules are obeyed to avoid punishment and a good or bad action is determined by its consequences. Stage 2 is a personal reward orientation where personal needs determine right and wrong.

2) a **Conventional level**, where judgments are based on others' approval, family expectations, traditional values and social expectations. Stage 3 is Good Boy-Nice Girl

orientation where good means 'nice' and it determined by what pleases others. Stage 4 is the law and order orientation, where laws are absolute and authority must be respected and social order maintained.

3) a **Postconventional level**, where judgments are based on more abstract and personal ethical principles. Stage 5 is a social contract orientation where good is determined by socially agreed-upon standards of individual rights. Stage 6 is the universal ethical principal orientation where good and right are matters of individual conscience and involve abstract concepts of justice, human dignity and equality.

Although there have been valid criticisms of each theory, they serve to provide parents and teachers with landmarks and criteria involved in socialization. As well, they are useful when considering which SEL programs to present at different times in a child's development.¹⁰² As the above theories indicate, the development of fundamental social skills occurs when children are school-age, which provides schools the opportunity to make lasting and influential contributions in the lives of children. Different school-based interventions address different areas, including: emotional literacy, moral education, social reasoning, problem solving, conflict resolution, anti-bullying, care-giving and community service. Thus, any SEL programming chosen needs to be grounded in theory, provide developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction and address the multitude of social skills important in development.

School-wide Strategies or Targeted Programming?

School wide approaches to SEL include such efforts as promoting the school's code of conduct, peer mentoring, clear rules of behavior and recognition of exemplary student behavior. Targeted programming on the other hand, addresses specific purposes such as bullying or promoting emotional literacy. The research on only using school wide approaches has shown efficacy for some programming and not others. For example, *Caring School Community*[™] (CSC) is a multiyear school improvement program that involves all students in grades K–6. The program aims to promote core values, prosocial behavior, and a schoolwide feeling of community. The program consists of four elements originally developed for the *Child Development Project*: class meeting lessons, cross-age "buddies" programs, "homeside" activities, and schoolwide community. Class lessons provide teachers and students with a forum to get to know one another, discuss issues, identify and solve problems collaboratively, and make a range of decisions that affect classroom life. Cross-age buddies activities pair whole classes of older and younger students for academic and recreational activities that build caring cross-age relationships and create a schoolwide climate of trust. Homeside activities, short conversational activities that are sent home with students for them to do with their parent or caregiver and then to discuss back in their classroom, incorporate the families' perspectives, cultures, and traditions, thereby

promoting interpersonal understanding. Schoolwide community-building activities bring students, parents, and school staff together to create new school traditions.

CSC is designed to: 1) create a caring, cooperative school environment; 2) build connections and foster trust and respect amongst students and teachers; 3) strengthen connections between school and home; 4) build student's academic motivation and support academic learning; 5) foster students' empathy and understanding of others; and 6) promote students' commitment to being fair, helpful, respectful and responsible. Battistich et. al. present the results of 15 years of research examining the impact of caring elementary schools on students and teachers across 24 schools and related control schools across the United States .¹⁰³ *Caring schools are defined as places where members care and support each other; actively participate in and have influence on the groups decisions and activities; feel a sense of belonging and identification with group members; and have common norms, goals and values.* This empirical research explored the theoretical concepts that caring schools address students' basic psychological needs of belonging, autonomy and competence.

Assessment methods included classroom observation, teacher questionnaires and student questionnaires conducted before program implementation and for 3 subsequent years, covering contextual and sociodemographic characteristics, classroom practices, classroom and school climate, teacher attitudes, beliefs and behavior and student attitudes, motives, behavior and performance. Within the classrooms, students' academic engagement, sense of influence in the classroom and positive interpersonal behavior were positively associated with the teachers' warmth and supportiveness, a focus on prosocial values, encouragement of cooperation and elicitation of student thinking and idea expression; and negatively associated with extrinsic control methods. Positive features for teachers were a climate that promoted high expectations for student learning, a stimulating learning environment, a feeling that they were effective, perceptions of principal competence, positive relationships between teachers and students and supportive parental involvement.

For students in disadvantaged areas, these effects were even more prominent and important. For example, intervention schools in the highest disadvantage communities also had the highest reports of class enjoyment, task orientation and student educational expectations. Across the three years, the program resulted in a positive effect on teachers' classroom practices, which in turn influenced student classroom behavior—causing changes in their sense of community and

increased positive student engagement, greater reports of prosocial values, warmth, cooperation and student thinking.

Alternately, school wide strategies alone were not shown to be effective for reducing bullying.¹⁰⁴ The authors evaluated 14 studies which included an evaluation component of their whole-school anti-bullying intervention. They found that from pre to post test, only programs in elementary and middle school reported any success and for those, 93% yielded negligible or negative effects on reducing victimization. Similarly, 92% of the programs yielded negligible or negative effects on reducing bullying of other children. The authors conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to abandon the whole school approach due to the lack of rigor identified in the studies. However, using only whole-school approaches (without other targeted programs) was not recommended.

School-based SEL programming has shown to be effective for enhancing student-school staff relationships^{105, 106} and school-family relationships¹⁰⁷ as well as children's mental health (Mifsud & Rapee, 2005).¹⁰⁸ For example, Mifsud and Rapee found that a school-based intervention program was effective for reducing anxiety in children from low socioeconomic status neighbourhoods compared to control schools. Further, a meta-analysis of 165 studies showed a positive relationship between school based SEL programming and reduced delinquency, alcohol and drug use, drop out and conduct problems.¹⁰⁹

Programs that use an evidence-based curriculum have also been shown to be effective. A meta-analysis of almost 300 studies of social-emotional development interventions in elementary, middle level, and high schools with school-based prevention programming showed that these programs significantly improved students' social-emotional skills, self-behaviors, and academic performance.¹¹⁰ As well, Greenberg and colleagues (2003) found, SEL programming is effective across a wide variety of settings and for children from very diverse backgrounds.¹¹¹

Thus, the research suggests that a combination of both school-wide and curriculum based SEL programming will provide the greatest results.

Effective implementation of SEL programs in schools

A number of authors have looked at how to most effectively implement SEL programs within schools. Greenberg and colleagues¹¹² recommended the following in relation to SEL content and process:

- Should be **planned, ongoing, systemic and coordinated**

- SEL instruction should **begin in preschool and continue through high school**
- Include a focus on **multiple domains** (e.g., individual, school, and family)
- **Long-term** (across years)
- Includes the school's **ecology and climate**
- Applies social-emotional skills to **real-life situations**
- Where SEL concepts are **incorporated throughout the regular academic curriculum**
- **Actively engaging students** in the learning process
- **Involve families and the community**

The importance of involving families and translating lessons to community contexts was identified by Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry (2004).¹¹³ They evaluated a family-focused preventive intervention that addressed risk in low-income communities (SAFEChildren) with 424 inner-city families. The program emphasized developmental tasks and community factors in understanding risk and prevention and included academic tutoring. Significant improvements in problem behaviors and social competence were found for those children who received this integrated program as well as improved reading ability, reading scores, and increased parental involvement in the school. This study also supports the inter-relationship between SEL, literacy and parental involvement. Devaney (2006)¹¹⁴ provides 10 concrete how-to steps in implementing SEL into schools. These are:

1. Commit to **schoolwide SEL**. Be a champion for SEL.
2. Engage stakeholders and **form a steering committee**. Invest them with genuine authority and responsibility for the work.
3. **Develop and articulate a shared vision**. The high hopes and dreams for students bring energy and a positive focus to the work.
4. Conduct a **needs and resources assessment**. Identify specific issues to address; build from what's already in place and working well.
5. **Develop an action plan**. Include the goals and objectives as well as a plan for attaining them.
6. **Select evidence-based programs and strategies**. The resulting shared framework and vocabulary creates consistency and coherence for the students.
7. **Conduct initial staff development**. Ensure that staff members understand SEL theory and practices.
8. **Launch social-emotional skills instruction in classrooms**. Help staff members become familiar with and experienced in SEL.
9. **Expand instruction and integrate SEL schoolwide**. Build a consistent environment and experiences for students.
10. **Revisit activities**; adjust for continuous improvement. Check on progress to catch problems early.

Finally, the research suggests that the most effective SEL programming has teachers as program leaders, uses a sequenced set of activities to develop SEL in a step-by-step manner, uses interactive forms of learning (e.g., role playing) where students can practice skills; and has at least eight sessions dedicated to SEL skills.¹¹⁵ Based on a recent meta-analysis of SEL programming in schools, Durlack et al. (2009)¹¹⁶ found that effective SEL programming by school personnel must be supported by coordinated state and educational policies, leadership, and professional development to foster the best outcomes. Additional information for SEL implementation can be obtained by CASEL (2006).^{117, 118}

Evidence-based SEL Programs

Similar to the area of literacy, government and educational organizations have taken on the role of scientifically evaluating the research on SEL programming. The most comprehensive evaluations are completed by CASEL in their document entitled *Safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based SEL programs* (CASEL, 2003).¹¹⁹

CASEL has identified five groups of inter-related core social and emotional competencies that SEL programs should address:¹²⁰

- **Self-awareness:** accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence;
- **Self-management:** regulating one's emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and persevering in addressing challenges; expressing emotions appropriately; and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals;
- **Social awareness:** being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and recognizing and making best use of family, school, and community resources;
- **Relationship skills:** establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed; and
- **Responsible decision making:** making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community.

Based on CASEL's rigorous inclusion criteria, at present, 80 multiyear, sequenced programs have been reviewed and 21 have been identified as 'Select' programs because they provide outstanding coverage in five essential SEL skill areas; have at least one well-designed evaluation study demonstrating their effectiveness; and offer professional development supports beyond the initial

training. Below is a brief list of CASEL's Select programs as identified on their website (see <http://www.casel.org/programs/selecting.php>).

*Service-learning component, ***Main emphasis on school and classroom climate

*****Caring School Community** (Child Development Project): This K-6 program focuses on building a school community based on caring relationships between students, teachers, and families. Such caring is expected to increase student attachment to school and mediate positive student social, emotional, and academic outcomes. It stresses good citizenship.

Community of Caring (Growing Up Caring): A K-12, comprehensive, whole school character education program that emphasizes the five core values of caring, family, respect, responsibility, and trust as important guides for adolescent life choices and decision making related to health, drugs, sex, and staying in school. The program also promotes good citizenship, civic responsibility, and respect for the environment.

High/Scope Perry Preschool Project: This PreK-3 program creates a learning environment where young children naturally engage in 58 "key experience" activities that foster development of important skills and abilities. These include creative representation, language and literacy, initiative and social relations, movement, music, classification, seriation, number, space, and time. The conceptually- and empirically-based framework is based on five key principles: (1) active learning; (2) supporting children's initiative and understanding their actions; (3) a child-friendly, inviting and home-like learning environment; (4) a consistent daily routine; and (5) ongoing child assessment.

I Can Problem Solve (ICPS): A PreK-6 interpersonal problem-solving curriculum with 59-83 lessons per year designed to prevent anti-social behaviors and help children learn to generate solutions to everyday problems, consider others' points of view and possible consequences of an act, and arrive at nonviolent solutions to conflict.

Know Your Body: A K-6 skills-based comprehensive health education curriculum with 49 lessons per year covering health topics such as nutrition, exercise, safety, disease prevention, consumer health issues, dental care, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, and violence prevention, as well as citizenship topics.

Learning for Life: A K-12 general social skills program with 35-60 lessons per year designed to prepare students to successfully handle the challenges of today's society and enhance their self-confidence, motivation, and self-esteem. Citizenship is addressed through lessons on environmental, social, and other community issues with occasional participation in service-learning activities.

* **Lions-Quest "Skills" series**: This K-12 series of curricula focuses on character education, service-learning, and violence and substance abuse prevention. Lions-Quest programs are designed to help students develop the behaviors and skills needed to become healthy and capable adults. With 64-103 lessons per year, this series includes Skills for Growing (K-5), Skills for Adolescence (6-8), and Skills for Action (9-12). The series provides broad coverage of substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, and citizenship.

Michigan Model Teenage Health Teaching Module: A K-12 comprehensive health education curriculum with 43-58 lessons per year that extensively address health topics including relationships, safety, emotions, physical senses, pollution, exercise, and nutrition. Substance abuse, smoking prevention, and violence prevention/conflict resolution are addressed thoroughly. Healthy sexual development is also covered.

PATHS: This PreK-6 curriculum provides 30-45 lessons per year designed to promote social and emotional competence, prevent violence, aggression, and other behavior problems, improve critical thinking skills, and enhance the classroom climate. There is broad coverage of violence prevention and citizenship.

Peace Works: Peace Works is a collection of grade-level-specific conflict resolution curricula— Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids (preK-2), Peace Scholars (3-4), Creative Conflict Solving for Kids (5), Creating Peace, Building Community (6,7), Fighting Fair (8), and

Win!Win! (9-12)—offering 16-48 lessons per year. There is also a peer mediation training component starting at fourth grade and going through high school. Based on Marzano's Dimensions of Learning, the program seeks to improve the school and classroom learning environment. There is broad coverage of violence prevention and citizenship.

Productive Conflict Resolution: This K-12 program includes 32-69 lessons per year and aims to empower students to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence, develop their emotional intelligence, enable them to uphold social justice, become responsible citizens, and participate in creating a caring and cooperative school environment. Broad multiyear coverage of violence prevention includes peer mediation training, understanding conflict, and the role of media in perceptions of violence and bullying.

Project ACHIEVE: Project ACHIEVE's PreK-8 Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Program and School Safety component includes the Stop and Think Social Skills curriculum, which consists of 20 sequenced "core" and "advanced" skills. The program is designed to promote social skills, conflict resolution, academic achievement, and a positive school climate.

*** **Reach Out to Schools/Open-Circle Program**: This comprehensive, year-long, grade-differentiated K-5 social competency curriculum aims to help children become ethical people, contributing citizens and successful learners, and to help schools foster the development of relationships that support safe, caring, and respectful learning communities. The program has three major content areas: creating a cooperative classroom environment, solving interpersonal problems, and building positive relationships.

Resolving Conflict Creatively & Partners in Learning (from ESR): With 28-51 lessons per year, RCCP's model includes a series of classroom-based SEL curricula, including Resolving Conflict Creatively (K-6), and Conflict Resolution in the Middle School, an extensive staff development component, parent workshops and a peer mediation program. A primary aim of RCCP is to help students develop the social and emotional skills needed to reduce violence and prejudice, form caring relationships, and build healthy lives. Another is to provide schools with a comprehensive strategy for preventing violence and other risk behaviors, and creating caring and peaceable communities of learning. RCCP also provides broad coverage of citizenship.

*** **Responsive Classroom**: The Responsive Classroom K-6 approach to teaching, learning, and living aims to create classrooms that are responsive to children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs through developmentally appropriate experiential education. Rather than structured lessons, it is based on six essential components or practices: classroom organization; morning meeting; rules based on respect for self and others and logical consequences of violating these rules; academic choice; guided discovery; and family communication strategies.

Second Step: With 8-28 lessons per year, this PreK-9 curriculum is designed to develop students' social and emotional skills, while teaching them to change behaviors and attitudes that contribute to violence. The program focuses on teaching empathy, anger management, and impulse control, and provides broad, multiyear coverage of violence prevention.

*** **SOAR: Skills, Opportunity, and Recognition**: SOAR intends to create a community of learners through a school-wide K-6 program designed to strengthen instructional practices and increase family involvement. It addresses research-based risk and protective factors and focuses on providing students with skills, opportunities and recognition at school and at home. To develop healthy behaviors in students, the program helps educators and parents learn to consistently communicate healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior; foster the development of strong bonds to their families, schools, and communities; and recognize the individual characteristics of each young person. One component for parents, Preparing for the Drug Free Years, aims to give parents information and skills to reduce the likelihood of substance abuse by their children.

Social Decision Making and Life Skills Development: This K-6 program has 25-40 lessons per year and is designed to help children recognize and use their emotions in

effectively solving problems in a wide range of real-life situations inside and outside the classroom.

*** **Tribes Learning Communities:** Tribes TLC PreK-12 program aims to promote learning and human development by creating a positive school and classroom learning environment. The program is designed to help students feel included, respected for their differences, involved in their own learning, and confident in their ability to succeed.

* **Voices: Reading, Writing, & Character Program:** Voices is a K-6 integrated, multicultural literature-based, comprehensive reading and character education curriculum. It focuses on six core social skills and values: identity awareness; perspective taking; conflict resolution; social awareness; love and freedom; and democracy. The program provides broad coverage of violence prevention and citizenship.



The *What Works Clearinghouse* (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>) also provides evidence reviews of programs related to character education (moral and ethical values as respect, fairness, and caring—as well as responsibility, trustworthiness, and citizenship). WWC identified programs that deliberately attempt to develop students' character by teaching core values and that had most if not all of their lesson plans or prescribed activities directly related to instilling those values. Most programs did not enter their review because of this criterion. For programs that did, most had only one or two small studies that met their evidence standards where student outcomes were measured in three domains: behavior, academic achievement, and knowledge, attitudes, and values. Ninety-three studies of 41 programs that qualified were reviewed. Of these, 18 studies from 13 programs met their evidence standards, 7 without reservations, and 11 with reservations as of July 2006. For elementary children, the program, *Positive Action* had positive effects on behavior and on academic achievement and *Too Good for Violence* had potentially positive effects on behavior and on knowledge, attitudes, and values. The following program descriptors are from WWC's website.

Positive Action, a K–12 program, aims to promote character development, academic achievement, and social-emotional skills and to reduce disruptive and problem behavior. The program is based on the philosophy that you feel good about yourself when you think and do positive actions, and there is always a positive way to do everything. The curriculum includes six units; some grades have a review for a seventh unit. All lessons are scripted and use classroom discussion, role-play, games, songs, and activity sheets or text booklets. Optional components that may or may not be implemented as part of the program are: site-wide climate development; drug education for grade 5 and middle school; conflict resolution; counselor, parent, and family classes; and community/coalition components.

Too Good for Violence promotes character values, social-emotional skills, and healthy beliefs of elementary and middle school students. The program includes seven lessons per grade level for elementary school (K–5) and nine lessons per grade level for middle school (6–8). All lessons are scripted and engage students through role-playing and cooperative learning games, small group activities, and classroom discussions. Students are encouraged to apply these skills to different contexts. *Too Good for Violence* also includes optional parental and community involvement elements.

Specifically for **children at-risk** in elementary school, two programs met WWC’s evidence standards. See Table 6.

Table 6. WWC’s Effectiveness Ratings For Character Education: Academic achievement (Limit Results to: Targeted/At-Risk Students, Non-Targeted, School-Wide, Classroom-Level, Literacy/Reading, Life Skills, Health, Service Learning, Integrated Across Subjects, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

Intervention ▲	Improvement Index ↓	Evidence Rating ▲	Extent Of Evidence ▲
<u>Lessons in Character</u>		+	Small
<u>Caring School Community™ (CSC)</u>		○	Medium to Large

Lessons in Character is designed to promote elementary and middle school students' knowledge about core character education values and, through that knowledge, shape children's positive behaviors and support academic success. It consists of 24 lessons organized around weekly themes, taught through stories, writing activities, and class projects. Teachers introduce the theme with a story that shows a value in action; students then engage that topic with a variety of activities. The program also includes daily oral language development and weekly writing assignments, optional parts of the program's implementation. *Lessons in Character* was found to have potentially positive effects on academic achievement. It had no discernible effect on behavior or on knowledge, attitudes, and values.

Caring School Community™ (CSC) is a modified version of a program formerly known as the *Child Development Project*. *CSC* is a multiyear school improvement program that involves all students in grades K–6. The program aims to promote core values, prosocial behavior, and a schoolwide feeling of community. The program consists of four elements originally developed for the *Child Development Project*: class meeting lessons, cross-age "buddies" programs, "homeside" activities, and schoolwide community. Class lessons provide teachers and students with a forum to get to know one another, discuss issues, identify and solve problems collaboratively, and make a range of decisions that affect classroom life. Cross-age buddies activities pair whole classes of older and younger students for academic and recreational activities that build caring cross-age relationships and create a schoolwide climate of trust. Homeside activities, short conversational activities that are sent home with students for them to do with their parent or caregiver and then to discuss back in their classroom, incorporate the families' perspectives, cultures, and traditions, thereby promoting interpersonal understanding. Schoolwide community-building activities bring students, parents, and school staff together to create new school traditions.

Additional SEL programs used in The Inner City Schools

Readers should note however, that just because a program has not be identified by the two organizations above, does not mean that it isn't evidence-based. Both organizations applied specific criteria that may have excluded some programs and/or conducted reviews before published evidence existed. One case in point is a program utilized in the Inner City Schools

called *Roots of Empathy*. According to very recent research, *Roots of Empathy* (ROE) showed effectiveness in several national and international research studies (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States). Findings from these evaluations support the program's goals of developing social and emotional competence, decreasing aggression and increasing prosocial behaviour. As well, preliminary results from a long-term follow-up study show that these positive effects endure over time.^{121, 122} A description of the program from their website is provided (<http://www.rootsofempathy.org/ProgDesc.html>).

Roots of Empathy. At the heart of the program are a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom every three weeks over the school year. A trained ROE Instructor coaches students to observe the baby's development and to label the baby's feelings. In this experiential learning, the baby is the "Teacher" and a lever, which the instructor uses to help children identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others. This "emotional literacy" taught in the program lays the foundation for more safe and caring classrooms, where children are the "Changers". They are more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy) and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically and emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other cruelties. In the ROE program children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice. Messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus building contribute to a culture of caring that changes the tone of the classroom. The ROE Instructor also visits before and after each family visit to prepare and reinforce teachings using a specialized lesson plan for each visit. Research results from national and international evaluations of ROE indicate significant reductions in aggression and increases in pro-social behaviour.

Curriculum-based violence prevention programs. A large number of programs currently being used in The Inner City Schools are curriculum-based violence prevention programs (see Appendix B). These programs are incorporated into the classroom lessons by the teacher and cover a wide range of issues related to school-based violence such as bullying, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relationships. They often use interactive learning such as story-telling for younger ages, role-playing, and classroom exercises.

Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation. A wide range of techniques has been developed for teaching children and youth cooperative strategies to deal with conflict as a means of counteracting school-based violence.^{123, 124, 125} Many of these programs are skills-based curriculum programs addressing peer-helping, negotiating, and conflict and anger management. Children are taught specific skills, techniques, strategies, and language to deal with conflict situations. Programs typically focus on the acquisition of strategies and skills that enable students to resolve disputes before they escalate to a physical level, to intervene when someone is being victimized, and to help find "win-win" solutions to conflicts.

Peer mediation programs are also being used in the Inner City Schools. In these programs, students are trained in the basics of conflict mediation, typically for the school yard. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley and Burnett (1992) ¹²⁶ describe the process as: 1) involved parties must agree to mediation with a neutral mediator, and 2) they must agree to six conditions: (a) solve the problem; (b) do not resort to name calling; (c) do not interrupt; (d) be as honest as you can; (e) if you agree to a solution you must do what you agreed to do; and (f) anything said in mediation is confidential.

There is little systematic research supporting the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, ¹²⁷ however anecdotal evidence suggests positive benefits for student mediators and the school. For example, Johnson, Johnson and Dudley ¹²⁸ found that relative to comparison groups, conflict training was found to be successful in teaching negotiation skills and mediation techniques to grade 3 children.

Response by Schools to Violence Prevention (RSVP). Developed for elementary, middle, and secondary levels, RSVP teaches life and social skills, promotes team-teaching, involves parents, and is easily integrated into the curriculum. The empowerment of children to act in positive ways is the main program goal. Towards this end, six critical teachings are woven into curriculum: Healthy Relationships, Communication, Self Esteem, Personal Safety, Prevention of Stereotyping, and Family Violence Awareness. Key concepts of RSVP are understanding healthy relations, developing communication and problem-solving skills (including conflict resolution skills), building self esteem, learning to recognize stereotyping, increasing knowledge of personal safety issues, and gaining awareness about family violence, cohesively combine to empower children to act in positive ways. Gaining strengths in these areas is believed to help students deal with family violence, a root cause of violent behaviour. A number of school-based evaluation studies have demonstrated that learning and change do occur. Short-term results indicate fewer fights on the playground, improved school climate, less teaching time spent on disruptions in the classroom as well as attitudinal changes. ¹²⁹

Using Your WITS: Strategies to Stop Bullying (grades 3-6). The WITS primary program is a curriculum-based elementary school program designed to prevent peer victimization. WITS stands for "Walk away", "Ignore", "Talk it out (use words, not fists)", and "Seek help". It's a simple way for children to remember workable, developmentally appropriate, interpersonal negotiation strategies for handling conflicts with peers. The program consists of six

dramatizations that show elementary school students conflict resolution and refusal skills. Teachers can access the following materials at (<http://rocksolid.bc.ca/>): a written curriculum that directs teachers to a wealth of early childhood literature and activities that can be used both to reinforce WITS messages and to teach to the learning outcomes required by elementary school curriculums in personal planning, language and visual arts, and drama; and WITS manuals. Early research has shown that the WITS program was able to reduce relational and physical victimization in children in grades 1 to 3, particularly in inner-city schools with children on income assistance.¹³⁰ A large scale evaluation of all of the WITS programs is underway.

Recommendations for Evidence-based SEL Program Choice and Implementation

The previous section on evidence-based SEL programming presented a large array of different programs for addressing different goals and for different age groups. Those programs with evidence-based research supporting SEL can be identified using CASEL's and WWC's web-sites. As well, programs with recent evidence and those who are currently being investigated were presented if they were being used in the Inner City Schools. Many of the newer programs have been introduced to the Vancouver School Board through collaborations with universities, such as The University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria. It is recommended that these collaborations continue as they provide the opportunity for information, training, assessment and evaluation. When choosing which programs to use for SEL, the research presented recommends that program planners consider the current needs of the school or school district using a needs assessment, match identified needs with research-based interventions, use both school-wide and program specific approaches, ensure that programming covers multiple years, choose programs that include families and communities, implement SEL from preschool through to high school and make sure that the program is developmentally appropriate. Also presented was a number of recommendations for implementing SEL programs, such as ensuring the emotional competency of teachers, using teachers as program leaders, promoting a climate conducive to SEL, support from educational leaders, and adequate training and evaluation.

Successful SEL Programming in the Inner City Schools: Staff and Student Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held that discussed the impact of SEL in the Inner City Schools. The first was with Support Workers and Teachers specializing in SEL in 9 of the 12 schools for a total of 11 participants.

Table 7 present the results of which SEL programs are used in these schools and the number of people who identified the specific program as most important (frequency of choice/11 individuals)

Table 7. Focus group results from Inner City Staff- What is working in your school / community to promote Social and Emotional Development?

Program	Number of inclusions	Frequency of choice
Roots of Empathy	8	2
Respect Safety Violence Prevention R.S.V.P.	4	1
Abuse Care Kit	10	
Friends	3	
Second Step	4	
Mindfulness	4	1
Peer Helpers, Mentors	8	4
Focus on Bullying	7	1
Anti-Racism Training	3	
Anti-homophobia training	7	
Before, after school and noon programs	10	9
Articulation process with Community School Teams	7	
Hot meal programs	10	1
Special school events around food	10	
Parent Tot programs	5	
Sarah McLachlan music outreach	3	
SOS Save One Student	1	
School based team, counseling team	10	
Drama productions	5	
Support roles – FN, NA, YFW, SSW	10	7
Kid Start	1	
Kid Safe	7	6
Small Friendship groups	9	1
Outreach - school community link, FN, lunch outside school	3	
Guest speakers	10	
Class meetings	8	
Case conferences on vulnerable kids	10	1

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Art and Play therapy	10	1
Outdoor education camps	10	1
UBC Learning Exchange	5	3
Wrap around approach for all students	7	1
School gardens	9	2
Big Brothers	5	
Partnership with UBC and SRT	2	
ALERT program	6	2
Virtues program	3	
Morning announcements	8	
Student councils	4	1
Evening events with community after school	5	
Non-profit partnerships	5	
Family matters	1	
Restorative Justice	7	1
ROCKS/ BROCKS	1	
Implementation of Code of Conduct	10	3
Band/ Choir/ Music out of class time	7	1

As Table 7 shows, most of the SEL efforts currently happening in the Inner City schools, based on the perspective of staff, centre around school-based initiatives such as implementing the code of conduct, having students give morning announcements, bringing in guest speakers, and art and play therapy. Out of school programming was also highlighted such as outdoor education camps, KidSafe and programs given before, at noon and after school. Support roles and case conferences were also identified as important as well as the provision of the meal plan and food related events. Very few evidence-based programs are being used with the exception of *Roots of Empathy* and *Second Steps*. Those programs that are being used, focus on violence prevention such as peer helpers, RSVP and anti-homophobic training. When participants were asked to identify the most effective strategy at their school, the majority chose professional support and out of school programming.

The second focus group consisted of 26 students representing all of the Inner City Schools. The students were in grades 6 and 7 and were asked to identify what was successful in their schools. Regarding social emotional development, they identified the importance of the followings:

Table 8: Student Focus Group Results: SEL Programming

Staff important

- Counselors are helpful to stop bullying and peer counselling, Could use more.
- Youth and Family Workers hang out with kids, give suggestions on what to do, will come to your house, coach teams, refer to outside counselling, set up programs like anti-bullying
- Neighbourhood Assistants help with language translation, help new immigrants, organize cultural events, help families in poverty get clothes and things, help with anti-bullying

Student leadership roles were also identified as important and included the following: (30 items were mentioned)

- Student Led Assemblies
- Announcement Monitors
- School Safety Patrol
- Green Team
- Event Organizers
- Community Service Hours
- Social Responsibility Clubs
- Fund raising

Finally, programs that made a difference included: (50 items were mentioned)

- Peer Tutoring
- Buddy Programs – with younger students, with special needs learners, with community agencies like Seniors’ Centre, etc., with mentors like Vancouver Giants
- Homework Club
- Neighbourhood after school programs
- Newspaper club
- “I can do it” club
- Literature Circle
- Justice Theatre
- Guest Speakers
- Jump Rope for the Heart
- Terry Fox
- Community service (support for developing countries for basics of food & water for example)

Similar to the staff results, the students focused on school-based SEL programming, out of school programming and the importance of professional staff. Where the results diverged was the students’ identification of the importance of student leadership programs, social responsibility clubs and community service programs.

Finally, a key informant interview was conducted with a Social Emotional Learning Consultant responsible for district wide programming and one who worked for many years in the Inner City Schools.

Key informant Interview

Social Emotional Learning Consultant

Worked at full, partial and non-inner city schools. Partial model where funds were distributed across schools and not isolated to 12 schools worked better- met more student needs of inner city students across the district. "It is not the school- it is about the students" . It is a group of students within the school but not the whole school itself that is important to consider. When went from partial/full to full model only- IC students in partial IC schools lost benefits of the funding. Right now it is all or nothing. **Consider returning to partial/full funding model.**

Review funding allocation based on school size and outside support. Disparities also seen across ICS: all get the same funding regardless of school size. As well, some schools get a lot of outside community-based support.

Need to examine the S-E needs within each school in the district. All schools in the district (not just ICS) have children with S-E needs. The highest need students often go to district programs- Special Remedial/Children's' Foundation/Social Development - which is available to all students in the district (highest externalizing behaviour - <1%), so they are being addressed already.

Extra support- Y& F worker, NA- helping parents accessing community support. Only general guidelines- about what the money is used for. Needs of student are no different from students at other schools- just the percentage of students with S-E need are higher in ICS. Won't find S-E needs which are specific to inner city schools regarding basic mental health.

Need cohesive planning across the whole district and within schools re. S-E.

Within schools. How did you assess need? Examine each class and identify who needs support, also looked at class dynamics- decision around program- divided them up into groups, e.g., grade 4 boys and provided programming or support such as social skills training. For Early intervention – k teachers selected students: mixed group of students with high needs and those who are high functioning- models.

Across district. Increasing our effectiveness and being strategic- **assessing who the students are and – why are we doing what we are doing? How are doing it?**

Considerations: 1) Balance whole class needs vs specific intervention for individual/groups of students- do all of the students need it? **Having criteria for assessment-** for who receives the programs/interventions? Working with the other resources- district consultants.

2. **Develop networks within school and across schools** so there isn't replication of effort or multiple efforts on same child.

3. **Team building:** Within school- training on how to work as a team (with principal). Be able to access district resources. Have them use the school resources first before asking district for more- working with school staff not in isolation. Carve out time for group to meet. Best practice: Who should be on the team? S-E Y&F, First Nation, administrator, counselor, MCW, SWIS (if work at school on a regular basis) – need to ensure resources are working effectively.

4. **Balance ICS resources with Community Link resources.**

Community school teams- community school coordinator- also have a youth and family worker is shared across one high school with up to 6 elementary schools)- east side. Spread around resources to other schools.

5. **Ensure pull-out program/services/events and external community programs aren't interfering with academics excessively.** Some of the ICS students are involved in so many programs. So important for students to get consistent education – if pulled out all the time- how can they have good social emotional health? Need to balance academics with pull-out/community programming.

6. **Ensure ICS programming and resources are student centered not school centered.** We as a district need to be more strategic about guiding what to do and how to do it. Where it has worked well- good leadership. Need guidance on team building and coordination across programming. Be strategic such as developing networking, training, dedicated time, guidelines, and reviewing job descriptions.

7. **Have guidelines about when students need more intensive community based support.** Because there are the extra staffing in ICS- school's don't always know when to move the child out to community resources- because we have staff (need criteria for moving children into more intensive supports) – may be beyond the expertise of the support staff, and take a lot of support staff time.

Thus, the schools in the Inner City Project are all utilizing a school-wide approach (code of conduct, student recognition, etc), however, a more coordinated effort is needed for program specific methods. As well, more concerted effort is needed to address SEL programming district-wide, addressing team-building, networking and training efforts as well as identifying guidelines for how to assess student need and when community-based help should be acquired.

Recommendations for Promoting SEL in the Inner City Schools

Although SEL is important for the wellbeing of all children, it is **vital** for children living in poverty. Introducing ***A Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum*** (see below) will provide them with the skills, understanding and opportunities for dealing with the additional chaos inherent in living in disadvantaged areas. The following recommendations are based on the research evidence and the focus group and key informant data.

1. Conduct a SEL needs assessment for all schools within the Inner City Schools Project.
2. Provide teachers/support worker with emotional competency training through professional development efforts.
3. Develop a district wide policy that supports SEL programming in each grade--that includes both school-wide and program SEL training, ensuring that all core competencies are addressed (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making), includes components involving families and communities, and guidelines for assessment and outside referral.

Suggestion:

A Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

K- Roots of Empathy

- 1- Emotional literacy (*PATHS*)
- 2-Problem-solving (*Restorative Justice*)
3. Emotional literacy " *Wits*"
4. *Roots of Empathy*
5. Anti-bullying "*Steps to Success*"
6. Conflict resolution
7. Leadership training and community service and learning

Meanwhile, schools should continue whole school efforts such as code of conduct, peer mediation, guest lecturers, student recognition, after school clubs, and out of school programs.

4. Facilitate networking opportunities for all individuals working on SEL across the Inner City Schools.
5. Support SEL efforts by providing training in implementation, assessment and evaluation.
6. Develop a multi-discipline SEL approach within schools and across the Inner City schools.
7. Develop a program for engaging and providing SEL information to parents.
8. Develop a coordinated approach with community agencies to support SEL in out of school hours.

ENHANCING FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

The third foundational goal of the Inner City Schools is the promotion of family and community involvement. This section will define family involvement, present the research describing the effects of home-school relationships on low income children, explore research that provides recommendations for facilitating these relationships and present the suggestions from the focus groups of parents and school staff in the Inner City Schools.

“When parents do better, kids will do better”

Neighbourhood Assistant

Considerable research over the last 20 years has shown that family involvement in children’s education has positive benefits to the child in terms of attitude, attendance and academic achievement. Epstein ¹³¹ describes a framework of six types of parent involvement that includes:

1. **Parenting.** The basic obligations of parents include housing, health, nutrition, and safety for their children. Parents also should provide home conditions for learning at all levels.
2. **Communicating.** The basic obligations of schools include school-to-home communication (such as memos, notices, newsletters, report cards, conferences, and phone calls) and information (on schools, courses, programs, and activities). Parents provide home-to-school communication, making a two-way channel for interaction and exchange.
3. **Volunteering.** Parents volunteer their time and talents at school activities and fundraising.
4. **Learning at Home.** Parents help their children with homework and with setting educational goals.
5. **Decision Making.** Parents participate in PTA/PTO organizations and school decisions on policy, leadership, and advocacy.
6. **Collaborating with the community.** Parents encourage partnerships with community resources and services.

This review will focus on home-school relationships such as parents communicating with the teacher, helping in the child’s classroom and participating in school events and activities.

The Advantages of Family Involvement in Education for Children Living in Disadvantaged Areas

Family involvement has been suggested as an important mediator of student achievement and particularly important for low SES children who face other disadvantages. ^{132, 133,134} A longitudinal study of low-income children from kindergarten to grade 5, found that high

levels of family involvement such as attending parent–teacher conferences, visiting the classroom; attending school performances, social events, field trips and volunteering was predictive of gains in children’s literacy performance.¹³⁵ Domina¹³⁶ found that parental volunteering was also associated with a great reduction in behavioral problems in low-income children. As well, the length of involvement has shown to be important. Barnard¹³⁷ found that those low income African American families who were continually involved in schools were more likely to see their children complete high school. A meta-analysis of 41 studies specifically examining family-school involvement for disadvantaged children revealed a strong relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes (grades and standardized tests), regardless of gender or racial minority status.¹³⁸ Further, Dearing, Kreider & Weiss (2008)¹³⁹ found that increased involvement of low SES families in school, influenced child-teacher relationships, which in turn influenced children’s perception of their competency in literacy and mathematics and their feelings about school.

Important Considerations for Family-School Involvement

Important considerations for the Inner City Schools is the research associated with family involvement, culture, language and availability. Cultural differences have been found regarding home-school involvement. For example, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco¹⁴⁰ found that Mexican families defer to teachers as educational experts and view questioning a teacher as disrespectful. Immigrant Latino families have also been shown to place great importance on teachers as role models and provide educational support in indirect ways such as stressing the importance of school at home--through not through direct involvement in the schools.¹⁴¹

Time demands due to employment have also been identified as a barrier to home-school involvement in some studies¹⁴² but not in others.¹⁴³ Aspiazu, Bauer & Spillett (1998)¹⁴⁴ found that the long hours that immigrants work, influences direct home-school involvement activities. Weiss et. al., (2007)¹⁴⁵ found in their investigation of 390 low-income children in the United States, that the amount of mother’s combined work and enrollment in education/training predicted their levels of involvement. Mothers who worked part-time were involved more than those who worked more than 30 hours per week. However, those mothers who did not work at all had the least amount of involvement.

Finally, language barriers have also been found to influence home-school participation. McWayne, Compos and Owsianick (2008)¹⁴⁶ found that home language (e.g., Polish, Spanish) was negatively associated with fathers' school based involvement and home-school conferencing in a study of 171 urban Head Start parents. Wong and Huges¹⁴⁷ found that Spanish speaking parents reported lower levels of communication with schools compared to English speaking parents. The barriers identified above provide some direction for schools, in their efforts to promote greater family-school involvement.

Facilitating Family Involvement for At-risk Students

Schools located in disadvantaged areas that have formal parent involvement programs also report higher student achievement.^{148, 149} For example, Sheldon (2003)¹⁵⁰ found that when schools made an effort to accommodate parents' English reading skills; communicate with parents who do not attend meetings; encourage parent input, volunteerism, offer interactive homework; ensure that school leadership and parent committees represent the ethnic and racial composition of the population; and help school, families, students, and community share resources, students had higher standardized test scores.

How schools promote family involvement has shown to be extremely important in whether families become involved with schools. Dauber and Epstein (1993)¹⁵¹, in their national study of 2,317 inner-city elementary and middle school students, found that school attitudes and actions were more important than the parents' income, educational level, race, or previous school-volunteering experience in predicting whether the parent would be involved in the school. Davies et. al., (1991)¹⁵² recommend that schools establish a parent center, a home visitor program, and action research teams in order to promote parent involvement. Henderson and Berla (1994)¹⁵³ identified the following three effective school initiatives as most effective for involving parents: 1) comprehensive: reaching out to all families, not just those most easily contacted, and involving them in all major roles, from tutoring to governance; 2) well-planned: specific goals, clear communication about what is expected of all participants, training for both educators and parents; and 3) long-lasting: a clear commitment to the long-term, not just to an immediate project." (p. 13).

An extremely useful list of recommendations comes from Epstein (1995)¹⁵⁴ and is based on a compilation of research and practice (see below).

Epstein's Framework of Family Involvement and Sample Practices

Parenting

Help all families establish home environment to support children as students.

Sample Practices

Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.

Workshops, video-tapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.

Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy).

Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.

Home visits at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle, and high school. Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.

Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.

Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.

Communicating

Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.

Sample Practices

Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.

Language translators to assist families as needed.

Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.

Parent/student pickup folders of student work sent home for review and comments.

Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.

Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.

Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.

Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications.

Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.

Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, and so on).

Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.

Volunteering

Recruit and organize parent help and support

Sample Practices

School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.

Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families.

Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.

Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.

Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.

Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome.

Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate.

Organize volunteer work: provide training, match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs, and recognize efforts so that participants are productive.

Learning at Home

Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

Sample Practices

Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.

Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.

Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.

Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.

Calendars with activities for parents and students at home.

Family math, science, and reading activities at school.

Summer learning packets or activities.

Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.

Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives students responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's class work.

Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers.

Involve families and their children in all important curriculum-related decisions.

Decision Making

Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Sample Practices

Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.

Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.

District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement.

Information on school or local elections for school representatives.

Networks to link all families with parent representatives.

Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.

Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.

Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.

Source: From Epstein, J.L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kaplan*, 76 (9), 704-705.

Successful Strategies for Engaging Parents in the Inner City Schools: Parent and Staff Focus Groups Results

Two focus groups were conducted to examine successful strategies for facilitating family-school involvement. The first focus group consisted of 24 parents representing 8 schools, a Neighborhood Assistant and a Principal.

Parent Focus Group

Current Programs which are valued include:

- Early reading programs
- Kids in transition, grade 7 to 8
- Art and Literacy program
- Family literacy
- Coffee drop in – flexible, open door, inclusive, learner-centered
- Connections with community centres
- P.I. E. Partners in Education
- Strong family literacy,
- Food and dinners are important, serves to bond community
- Special things like Christmas Hampers, special events and programs mean a lot.
- School is very inclusive to children with special needs and helps other children understand and accept these children.
- Hot lunches very important.
- Healthy Snacks program supports kids who miss breakfast and who come in late.

Multicultural Issues–

- Parents not always confident to come into school
- REAL – Relevant Educating Adult Learners Program helps.
- Program increase comfort with parents
 - Volunteer parent group supported by staff
 - Parents can develop skills and then take leadership role amongst parents
 - Allows parents to share concerns and difficulties they may be experiencing
 - Bonding amongst parents and lasts even in transition to secondary school
 - E.g. K – 3, games and treats for Lunar New Year, learn traditions of other cultures
 - Parents sharing learning from other cultures
 - Parent centres build support systems
 - Feel welcomed by Principal and resource teacher
 - Immigrant families trust the school when they are faced with language challenges.
 - Principal and support workers accepts them to the community and supports referrals to other agencies.
 - Multicultural Home School Workers provide language support and Principal's supply the other supports
 - Cultural welcoming events teaches respect, shares joy of celebrations

Activities which help support parent involvement

- International Adult Learner Day/Week, strengthens home – school – community connections.
- Partners in Education – parent support piece
 - Child minding available, food, accessible, free
 - Joy of being class was knowing who daughter was talking about at home then getting to meet the parents of the classmates
 - Builds self esteem of kids, can praise other kids to those Moms who can't participate.
 - Respect shown for mom coming into the school
- Volunteer in cooking class
- School with climate of an open door policy
- K teacher welcomes parents to come in to read in the morning with the children
- Becoming Involved in the Parent Advisory Council
 - Need comfort with school/staff for parents to be involved. Not for all parents.
 - Key is connection first
 - Deliberate attention should be paid to ensuring cultural and ethnic diversity on PACs

Staff are important

- Principal sets mood and attitude.
- Neighbourhood Assistants and Youth and Family Worker make a huge difference with the one to one contact, Field trips, coaching – multilingual support.
- Need MCHSSW to allow parents to articulate needs. The NA, YFW, MCHSSW support teachers so teachers can teach.
- NA helps to welcome new people
- NA does the coordination of volunteers – harnesses all the community assets

After school programs are very important

- Allows parents ease of mind
- Kids in a safe place
- Many options, homework club, free play, social components
- Kids First – wonderful opportunity

Challenges

- Sharing spaces with other programs,
- Loss of support staff (sometimes causes NA to spend time doing work other than her own)

Recommendations

- Arrange time for parents of various cultures to meet
- Continue with special events such as the corn roast which allows parents to meet and offer support to others who are new to the school.
- Develop a Parent Mentor program.
- More sharing between Inner City PACs. Develop mechanism to talk to each other – blog, email, website.

- Develop mechanism for information sharing about resources and programs to all IC school parents
- Continue fun events with food (community cultural fair, potlucks)
- Honorariums to support volunteer translators who come in and help connect parents with the community and school.
- Develop activities that help school communities to accept and have a relationship with students with special needs., e.g., ASL training
- Develop a kid buddy system – link younger kids with older kids.

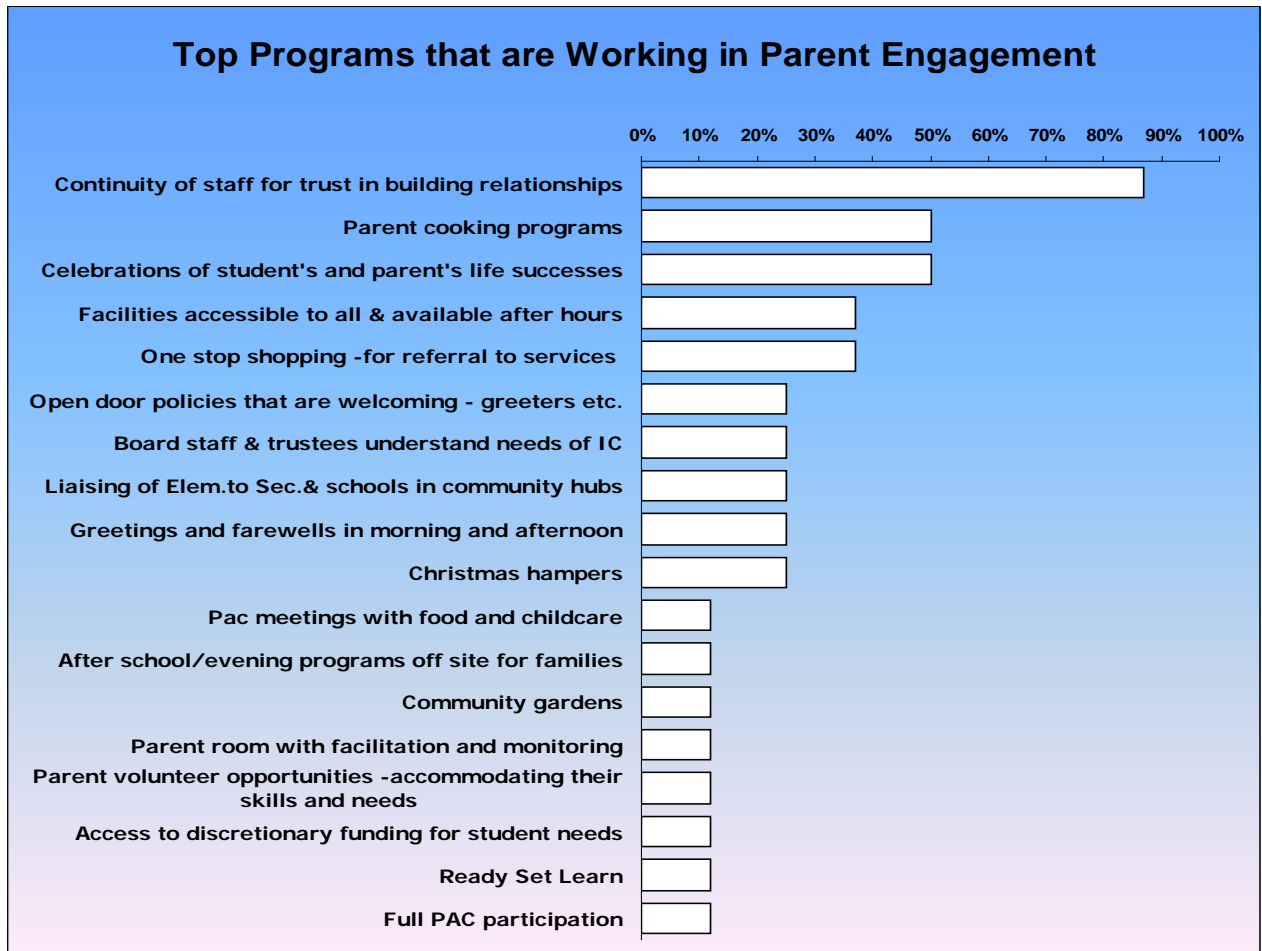
One Mother's Story: "I have a special needs child, was new to Canada and going through a messy divorce. The Principal and the Neighbourhood Assistant made appointments to assist me in getting housing and with safety concerns. Through their help and kindness, my family is settled – my kids are settled. The school recognized the needs of my family and simply helped. I am now also going to school. The school is my family now and I now try to extend this help to other parents".

Staff Focus Group: Enhancing Parent Engagement

The staff focus group on enhancing parent involvement involved 8 participants, including: a Project Teacher, 2 Youth and Family Workers, 3 Neighbourhood Assistants, 3 Counselors. Six of the 12 Inner City Schools were represented.

The following describes their recommendations for the most effective methods for engaging parents (graph) and suggestions for improving Parent/ Community Engagement, in order of priority (list):

Graph 1. Inner City Staff Recommendations of Effective Programs for Enhancing Parent Engagement



Staff Recommendations

- Transition from Elementary to Secondary for vulnerable kids
- More access to Multicultural workers to connect with parents
- Orientation for new teachers to Inner City schools
- Safe school grounds free of garbage
- Teacher training cohorts for vulnerable students
- Increase staff participation with flexible school time/calendar
- Availability of space for programs for families
- Recognition of attendance & support for getting children to school on time
- Parent Ed related to work skills
- More positive role models
- Consistent MCFD staff and policies
- Special groups for transition like YWCA, 7-11 connection
- Girls and Boys clubs for development and puberty issues
- Flexible hours for staff to help with after school programs
- Connections to community & employment programs

In summary, the research evidence shows that higher parental involvement is associated with higher student academic achievement, better attendance, a readiness to do homework, increased graduation rates, students' sense of competence, better self-regulatory skills, and beliefs about the importance of education. For at-risk children, family involvement is even more important and is associated with increased achievement in both academic and social emotional development. As well, parents involved in the schools improves child-teacher relationships and the child's feelings about school for low income children and youth. Parental involvement is moderated by how well parents are informed, empowered and involved in the school and their perceptions of a positive school climate.

Increasing family engagement should also take a systematic approach, which includes collecting information about parents' availability and creating flexibility in the timing of school events. Providing spaces in schools for parents to meet and celebrating different cultures was also recommended. Special events, particularly those involved with food such as potlucks, are highly appreciated by the families in the Inner City Schools. Developing mechanisms for information sharing about resources and programs to all Inner City school parents as well as networking opportunities for different groups such as Inner City PAC members was also suggested. Parents would also like to see a parent mentoring program established and the opportunity for honorariums for translation services.

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) believes that for children and youth to be successful, there must be an array of linked learning supports around them (see <http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time>). These learning supports include families, early childhood programs, schools, out-of-school time programs and activities, higher education, health and social service agencies, businesses, libraries, museums, and other community-based institutions. HFRP calls this network of supports '**complementary learning**'. Complementary learning is characterized by discrete linkages that work together to encourage consistent learning and developmental outcomes for children. These linkages should be continuously in place from birth through adolescence, but the composition and functions of the network will change over time as children mature.

Importance of Out-of-School Learning

The Harvard Family Research Project describes the expanded learning opportunities for children as consisting of afterschool programming, summer learning opportunities, extended day and year schools, community schools, school-community networks, and online learning opportunities (Little, 2009).¹⁵⁵ It is believed that providing these initiatives will ‘narrow the learning gap’ and assist in risk prevention and skill building. Unfortunately, the *Study of Predictors of Participation in Out-of School Time Activities*¹⁵⁶ found that youth from lower incomes were less likely to participate in these programs overall, and were not involved as often or in as many extracurricular and sport/recreation programs as youth from higher incomes. However, youth from lower incomes were involved in more after school tutoring activities in this American national study, which may explain their lower levels of participation in other programming.

In general, studies have shown that participation in out of school learning programs have benefits such as improved academics^{157, 158} and personal and social development (e.g., feelings of self-confidence) and a reduction in problem behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance, conduct problems and drug use.¹⁵⁹ One review of 35 studies reported that the test scores of low-income, at-risk youth improved significantly in both reading and mathematics after they participated in after-school programs.¹⁶⁰

Facilitating School-Community Partnerships

According to Epstein’s framework, mentioned earlier, methods for school-community collaboration involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, student learning and development. This can be accomplished by providing:

- **Information for students and families** on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services.
- **Information on community activities** that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.
- **Service integration through partnerships** involving school, civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses.
- Service to the community by students, families, and schools

Kakli et. al., (2006) ¹⁶¹ recommend the following tips for engagement of families with community organizations:

Consider setting the following *goals for after school providers*:

- Develop **“action plans”** that are sustainable and support objectives of your lead organization, including assessing parent needs and reducing barriers to parent involvement.
- Develop **consistent communication** with families in order to exchange information about their children’s interests and needs at home and school and during out-of-school time.
- **Increase the levels of family involvement, engagement, and leadership opportunities** at after school programs.
- **Increase utilization of community organizations and resources** that support children’s out-of-school time learning and family engagement.
- **Increase awareness of school calendar and activities** that would complement what happens in the school day.

Consider setting the following *goals for families*:

- **Increase familiarity and utilization of cultural institutions and other community organizations** in support of children’s informal learning.
- **Increase understanding of school expectations, opportunities, and resources** available to parents through the school system.
- **Increase engagement in children’s informal learning.** Consider employing *strategies* that help providers engage families after school:
- **Connect with community partners to plan training** for staff, host family nights, and provide resources for after school programs.
- **Identify and develop needed resource materials** such as strategy tip sheets, communication logs, and action planning sheets for program use.

Consider putting helpful *structures* in place to facilitate family engagement:

- **Form an advisory board** that includes administrative representatives of relevant agencies.
- **Hold regular monthly meetings** to coordinate project activities and assess progress on an ongoing basis.

Successful Strategies for School-Community Partnerships in the Inner City Schools: Community Surveys

Online surveys were conducted with 9 community organizations that collaborate with the Inner City Schools. These included community centres, service organizations, libraries, family and community enhancement services, mental health services, a police liaison officer and child care workers/child & youth teams. The following questions were asked: 1) What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City School?; 2) What Structure or Process Could Be Enhanced to Better Meet the Needs

of Vulnerable Children?; and 3) How Could the Partnership Between Your Agency and the VCB Inner-City Project Be Strengthened?

Community Surveys

Community Center

1.) *What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City School?*

A) **Provide a safe place for children in a variety of after-school programs where the learning will still continue.** The schools have allocated space for After-School Programming, provide support for my staff, and needed supplies (arts and crafts, access to gym equipment). Teachers and support staff play a huge role in our programming working with program staff to create activities they know their children will enjoy and will flourish from. Teachers actively refer children to our programs and identify the needs and the supports necessary for successful participation. Teachers and Center staff many time have taken a **successful team approach** when it comes to dealing with special needs, inactive, and hard to reach children. The Schools and Center Staff also work together to provide safe programs over **extended school breaks** (Christmas and Spring Break sadly 2 times a year a child at risk is most vulnerable). Holiday Safe-Place was then created running 9:00am-3:00pm with hot breakfast and lunch.

B) The average gross family income is between \$23,000.00-\$25,000.00. In a community where many families live in poverty, we need to keep costs down and serve greater numbers without losing the quality of our programs. This means **applying for grants, fundraising, and seeking out sources of revenue.** The school administration and center jointly apply for grants to sustain our programs. Though the funds are for After-School Programs, the schools value the benefit of these programs. We have been successful in applying for many grants because of our proven partnership. The schools have also supported and helped us plan many fundraisers for the families in our community.

C) 78% of our children come from English as a Second Language homes. The school is always seeking funds to sustain reading and literacy programs. We have been told that the adult literacy in our community is so low many do not qualify for Pre-Employment Training. Imagine as a child bring home school work and your parents unable to help you. The schools actively refer children to our Study Hall, Home-Work Club, Tutoring Program, Reading Club- all the above activities as mentioned is a **result of joint programming between center and school.** We also provide language program for Parents in **Partnership with the Vancouver Learning Exchange school providing the site, and center providing child minding.** For the past 4 years we have been able to offer the Learning through Literacy Program. Friday morning for parents grant is jointly operated by the Community Center, School and Capilano College.

D) 59% of our children come from single-parent homes, many parents are forced to work over seas because they cannot find jobs in Vancouver. In addition to education and leisure, the school and center staff have addressed the needs of many Families at Risk. This involves for **school staff hours outside of school and weekends.** **Closely working with organizations like the Ministry of Social Services,**

Vancouver Coastal Health, and Vancouver for the Center of Ability, we have been very successful.

E) Many children in our community are not physically gifted and socially mature, and some have been diagnosed with a special need. As a team, **staff from school and center have successfully matched these children with fun and exciting programs. We have also been successful in placing paid/volunteer leisure buddies** which enhances the participation of children in our activities.

2) What Structure or Process Could Be Enhanced to Better Meet the Needs of Vulnerable Children?

A) **Access to sites on weekends and evenings during the week.** Unfortunately the needs of our children do not take the weekend off. By having access to more program space Saturday, Sundays, and week day evenings, we could do so much more. Strathcona Elementary School is an exception for weekday evening but we only have access to the gym on weekend. **If Inner-City Schools could open up gyms and program space after-school and weekends they will also have a familiar, accessible, and safe place to meet.** Schools need to have a heightened awareness of the needs of their children during out of school times (after-school, holidays, and weekends). **Budgeting After-School and Holiday Programs as essential for learning.** If a child has a very positive, learning experience after-school they bring that positive, learning experience to the classroom the next morning.

B) **Capacity building in addition to the above language programs for parents,** provide opportunities for parents to become more involved in school activities. Parent involvement will enhance family relationships.

C) **Schools understanding and awareness of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation Services.** There are 22 other community centers doing a lot of great things. A program that every school should promote and endorse is the Leisure Access Card Program. Any family on social assistance or working poor can apply for this card which gives free access to public swimming, free access and skate rental in all rinks and 50% off in fitness centers(adults) and the Stanley Park train.

D) **Ensure food security.** It seems that all the problems a child may exhibit comes from poor nutrition. We provide a healthy breakfast and a healthy snack After-School. We also provide Cooking Fun For Families, giving parents basic knowledge of what's good food, where to find it, and how to prepare and cook it

E) **Identifying the Community Center as the After-School Shift, where learning will still continue.**

3) How Could the Partnership Between Your Agency and the VCB Inner-City Project Be Strengthened?

Consistency positive relationships have been built with the Administration. It does not help the children to see their Principals transferred to other schools. **Please especially if they want to stay, keep them at their schools.**

Invite me and my staff to any school conference, workshop, or meeting related to serving Inner-City Children. Let us be part of your program we definitely can learn from one another.

Acknowledge the extra work administrators and teachers commit to sustaining our partnership (meetings, program audits, problem solving).

Youth service organization

Here is a compilation of feedback from my staff, that work with these schools, and myself.

1. What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?

The schools we presently work in have been established for several years and are quite familiar with the program and are very supportive. The Community school team is very **engaged and committed to our mentoring programs**. The teen program is very popular with the teens and we have had more teens than we can accommodate. We are looking to expanding to the Annex. The staff at the school also buy into the program and are very supportive. At schools where we run the adult school program, the staff also understand the benefits of mentoring and work hard to ensure the program runs smoothly in their schools. **Support from school staff not only helps with the ease of the program, but also enhances child safety** because all participants are comfortable approaching school staff.

2. What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

The biggest challenge is the **lack of volunteers** from our end. The schools certainly have children they want to refer to the program but we don't get a lot of volunteers in these areas. Also, **more structured feedback on our programs and suggestions on how they could be more effective**. We would welcome discussion on after school programming that might better suit the needs of the school. **As space is sometimes a concern in schools, having a program after school may alleviate that.**

3. How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?

Perhaps trying to **develop some strategies with the schools, and other relationships they may, have would help recruit more volunteers** to this area for our existing schools and to perhaps expand to other schools. We frequently get calls from school's requesting our services but are unable to start the program there due to a lack of volunteers. **Looking at joint funding applications** could also be helpful. Some other challenges are the **lack of time of the school staff have to devote to our programs**. If we look at expanding and providing more services we need to be aware that this also puts additional work on the school staff involved in our programs.

Youth and Family Services

1. What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?

Communication: Weekly if not daily communication with the school. Youth and Family worker attends our youth team meetings every Tuesday. We

discuss youth specific issues and how both agencies can work together to assist the families in need. These meetings are very beneficial to get the same message across to children and youth especially when it relates to bullying, fights, family crisis, etc. We are also able to support each other with suggestions and implement solutions to support the families. **Program collaboration:** We offer joint programs for both children and parents. Such as Cooking Food For Fun which occurs every Thursday after school for the past 10 years. Other programs include Tuesday Homework Club, Family Literacy, Art Therapy, after school sports (seasonal). We have started new joint program with the school teacher and class on multi-media projects. Currently one of the intermediate class comes to our centre to work with staff on a Radio Play which will be broadcasted live on Vancouver Youth Radio plus working on other projects. Since we have the resources and equipment, it is a logical solution to host the class here. **Sharing of resources:** Includes staffing, equipment, vans, rooms, computers, training, family case conferences, funding special activities, etc. To stay consistent with specific training, our staff are schedule for A.R.T. training lead by VSB staff. By **having staff from both sites trained**, we will be able to consistently implement anti-bullying strategies.

2. What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

To **continue supporting the creativity, flexibility of the school to work with community agencies in non-traditional formats**. By providing children in the inner city with psycho-educational testing (add more resources and eliminate waiting lists) many children can not afford to wait for testing. **Also, sharing the results with community agencies so programs can be implemented that meets the needs of children not only in school but in out of school activities**. For example: our staff have been struggling to effectively support children with learning disabilities in the homework club and other educational activities. If we could access school personnel, we would be able to support the children and families by tailoring activities, programs and supports on an individual basis. **To be able to access school gyms without having VSB staff present**. For example: allowing our staff to provide the supervision. This would allow more access to gyms which would result in more programming for children and families.

3. How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened? **Staff continuity is very important. Keeping funds available for the Inner City Projects** is also key. People resources are so important with developing relationships in the inner city. Trust is a big issues for many families and children and when staff positions are eliminated or personnel replaced after a few years, it makes it very difficult to develop positive relationships. **This is very important with keeping the principal in place for at least 5 years**. It takes time to develop relationships, built continuity with programs and implement change and whenever you have staff turnovers you are basically starting from day one again. **Adding more resources both financially and equipment into the school** also helps.

Library

1. What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?

We have good lines of communication between the school and the public library. We have a **healthy working relationships** with school staff, students and parents. Because the physical space of our library is shared, it ensures a close relationship between school and public library.

2. What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

This school needs a **full time teacher librarian**. It would increase the amount of literacy programming that the school can do in the library. A full time library program is beneficial to any school and especially in schools where the students are at risk. Creating a full-time teacher librarian position would not only benefit the school, it would benefit vulnerable individuals throughout this entire community. Currently our teacher librarian helps with planning and implementing joint programs with other local schools (a number of which are also designated Inner City schools). The teacher librarian also helps plan and implement intergenerational programs which benefit the parents of students, the pre-school aged siblings of students, and members of the general public. As a part time employee, the teacher librarian cannot fulfill the full potential that this unique teacher librarian partnership position.

3. How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?

Enhance/sustain communication with **the Children's Services Manager of the Vancouver Public Library**.

Community Health Agency

1. What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?

From our perspective, there are certain Inner City Schools that regularly access our programs and services. As an example, we have received a large number of referrals for our Connect Attachment Group for parents of "at risk" children in the 8 to 12 year old age range. Given this kind of **working relationship with the school, we have been able to conduct some of the pre-group interviews at the school which helps to make the service more accessible to parents.**

2. What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

Our organization is an amalgamation of programs and services (ADHD Parent Program, Connect Parent Program, Concurrent Disorders, Boundaries, Foundations, Resilient Kids Program, and School Mental Health Promotion and Prevention) aimed at meeting the needs of children and youth at risk, **we would like to have a process by which we could disseminate information about our services quickly and efficiently to the Inner City Schools.** Also, we would like to hear **about the needs of these schools, particularly with regard to prevention and early intervention.**

3. How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?

The partnership could be strengthened by **having a designated contact person who could meet regularly with representatives of the VSB Inner City School Project.** This person would then be the conduit of information from VCH to the Inner City Schools, but would also make us aware of the particular needs of the various schools so that potential gaps in service could be brought to light.

Mental Health Clinicians

1. What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project School?

Our clinicians have developed some **ongoing relationships** over the years with VSB personnel (Principals, V-P's, Counselors, Teachers, Y & F Workers) at several inner city schools. These relationships ebb and flow depending on the number of team clients at a particular school, the level of contact (1:1 with the client at school vs. IEP meetings; regular vs. special classes) and changes in school/team personnel. Some clinicians see some clients regularly at school, and meet regularly with school staff; others may only attend IEP meetings. Many of the dedicated staff at these schools welcome mental health input and work collaboratively, others do not. Most clinicians view their client's school life as central to their wellness, while some are more focused on mental health concerns that may not include school. **When we listen to each other and work collaboratively in the best interests of our clients, it is highly effective.** When we retreat to our mental health or education silos, frustrations arise and our client's needs may be overlooked.

2. What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

The challenges facing inner city children and their schools (poverty, ESL, parental mental illness and special needs like LD, FASD and ASD) can be overwhelming. Yet, for most children, school remains a positive, safe and nurturing environment. This is testimony to the hard work and commitment of the teachers and support staff at these schools. From the perspective of our teams, our 'partnership' is informal and based on personal relationships. **What might enhance this network of personal relationships is a more formal leadership structure that could facilitate communication, information sharing, access to scarce resources and promote collaborative practice.**

3. How could the partnership be strengthened?

We are presently involved in community engagement work with Neighbourhood Houses and Family Places whose clients are often the same pre and school-aged, inner city children. Our initiative has assigned liaison persons for each NH or FP, and a pool of clinicians who might be able to respond to the requests for prevention/capacity building services at each NH. Although CYMH is too small to accommodate the needs of the VSB with a similar structure, the principles would still apply. **We could begin to formalize the partnership by regular meetings.**

Aboriginal Centre

1. What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?

- The partnership has worked well in **developing programs that respond to the needs of the students**, ie. homework club.
- The Inner City staff often **refer students to our programs**.
- **Relationships are established** so that other programming opportunities can be facilitated easily, ie. Ready, Set, Learn, Family workshops, welcoming communities, LIFT, community special events

2. What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

- **Build in time for VSB staff to attend local planning tables**, especially as they relate to vulnerable children in the community. (i.e. children's planning table)
 - **Improve communication and collaboration between community organizations** such as Family Services of Greater Vancouver, community centre, neighbourhood houses and government institutions that are working with vulnerable children.
 - **Fund/Support Buddy program** that partner up Secondary School Children and Elementary School Children.
3. *How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?*
- **Formalize the orientation for new principals or inner city staff to community**, ensuring that meet with our staff
 - **Create mechanisms for reducing red tape to develop supportive programs by outside agencies in the schools.**

Child and Youth Mental Health Services

1. *What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?*

The school principal and vice principal and many teachers of the school have worked with us to complete questionnaires to **track disruptive school behaviour** every three months to monitor mental health intervention, medical/therapeutic in the treatment process. At the parent's request, they have also **included us in the I.E.P. meetings** for the child. Teachers have also often spoken to us and **allowed us to observe children in their classroom settings.**

2. *What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?*

In particular in working with children of the Mentally Ill and Autistic Spectrum children, **Mental Health and Behaviour Interventionist trained to deal with these difficulties need to be allowed more input in I.E.P. meetings.**

3. *How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?*

More understanding between agencies of the limitations and difficulties in working together, but the importance if service delivery to client families are to be maximized.

Police Services

1a) The school principal has graciously welcomed me to their school and has **provided me with a shared office that has a computer and internet access.**

b) Most of the administrators, teachers, support workers, volunteers, etc....at my fifteen inner city elementary schools **are hospitable and police friendly.**

c) Many of the administrators and teachers at my inner city elementary schools appear to **welcome my numerous scheduled and unscheduled (impromptu) school and classroom visits which, I believe, creates a positive police role**

model and image re school attendance and classroom learning. In addition, my many contacts with students, parents, and community members before, during, and after school, helps develop and cultivate many positive police-student and police-community relationships.

2a) I believe **more police generated, age appropriate programs would be beneficial** (ie. the Red Cross' 'Child Abuse Prevention Program' which was later referred to as 'Abuse Prevention Services'; build on 'Gang Presentation'; build on the 'Odd Squad / Vancouver Giants' 'Drug Presentation; build on 'Decision Making', 'Bullying', 'Internet Safety' Presentations; etc....

B) More schools and staff members should **use me as a resource person to access and / or to facilitate classroom visits to and from various police related sections** (ie. Dog Squad, Motorcycle Squad, Mounted Squad, VPD Police Museum, etc....).

c) Encourage Secondary SLO's as well as patrol members to **attend the inner city elementary schools more often to visit with the students and to nurture relationships with the same, especially students who have been identified as 'at risk' students.**

3a) I believe **more inner city elementary school SLO's** would help the below.

b) I believe more secondary SLO as well as patrol visitations to the schools **before, during, and after school** would be beneficial.

c) I believe more NCO SLO visitations to all schools, not just the inner city elementary schools, would be beneficial too.

d) A greater VPD SLO **attendance at various VSB inner city school conferences, workshops**, etc....may be useful as well.

Licensed childcare workers and a child & youth team

1. *What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?*

- **Regular communication. flexibility** of various partners.
- **Rapport building and massive support** from the schools and staff
- **Building connections with students/parents** and connecting them to resources available for their children

2. *What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?*

- **More referrals from the schools** and the schools/teachers promoting the programs, **being aware of what is available in the community.**
- giving **more control over rental of space** to principals who have direct relationships with partner agencies.

3. *How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?*

- **Quarterly meetings** in regards to what is coming up and what is happening at the organization and also what is happening at the schools that we could

be involved with or even represent the organization at events where we can talk to kids and parents

- **Assessment of needs in the particular neighbourhoods and mapping out the services**, instead of duplicating programs
- Just being able to work together and collaborate

A compilation of the community organization's responses are provided in Table 9.

Table 9. Enhancing School-Community Collaboration- Survey of Community Agencies

What is working well in your partnership with an Inner City Project school?

- A successful team approach (n=4)
- Regular communication (n=3)
- Engaged and committed school staff (n=2)
- Relationship building (n=2)
- Collaboration in programming (n=2)
- Sharing resources
- Continued learning orientation
- Cooperative/joint funding applications
- Providing services to families (e.g., child minding)
- Extended school staff hours
- Providing fun and exciting programs
- Trained staff
- School providing office space and resources

What structure or process could be enhanced to better meet the needs of vulnerable children?

- Access to schools on weekends and evenings (n=4)
- Increasing knowledge of community agency/services to families (n=3)
- Share information about children to better meet their needs (n=3)
- Designate community agency as an out of school learning program (n=3)
- Increase capacity building with families (n=2)
- Formalize relationship to enhance information sharing, communication and collaboration (n=2)
- Budget for out of school learning (n=2)
- Provide more food security options to families/children
- Provide structured feedback from schools to community agencies
- Continue to support creative/flexible solutions
- Increase school staffing
- Increase access to students-at risk

How could the partnership between your agency and the VSB Inner City Project be strengthened?

- Involve community staff in school conferences, workshops, meetings that serve Inner City kids (n=3)
- Ensure consistency in school staffing to support relationships (n=2)
- Dedicate a position for school-community collaboration (n=2)
- Have regular meetings (n=2)
- Acknowledge extra effort of school staff in facilitating collaboration
- Initiate joint funding applications
- Provide more resources (financial/equipment)
- Reduce red tape
- Recognize barriers to collaboration and address them
- Conduct a needs assessment of community services in order to stop duplication of services
- Allow greater presence in schools

Evidence-based Recommendations for Promoting School-Community Partnerships

Thus, out of school programs can improve student academic achievement and SEL. Student participation can result in less disciplinary action; lower dropout rates; better academic performance in school, including better grades and test scores; greater on-time promotion; improved homework completion; and improved work habits. As well, these programs situate youth in safe environments, prevent youth from engaging in delinquent activities, teaches them general and specific skills, beliefs, and behaviors and provides opportunities for youth to develop relationships with peers and mentors. The research shows that coordination between the schools and supplemental education providers results in better student homework completion, homework effort, and positive behavior. This may be because positive relationships with schools can foster high-quality, engaging, and challenging activities. After school and summer programming is important for poorer youth due to an opportunity gap where lower income children and youth have less access to enrichment opportunities than their more affluent and advantaged peers.

The recommendations from the research are echoed by the community surveys. The Inner City Schools could enhance community-school collaboration by developing opportunities for collaboration in networking, meeting, and joint funding applications. As well, increased communication of community services to families would assist efforts as would access to school grounds and students at risk for providing services.

Providing more funding to run programs and a dedicated position for facilitating school-community collaboration would also help more families and children.

SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE

Many of the key ingredients for promoting literacy, SEL and parent and community engagement exist within the 12 schools or have been recommended. What is needed is a **systematic focus within and across schools regarding programming, networking, training and professional development**. Specifically:

- Developing a common vision, mission, and role clarity specific to the Inner City Schools;
- Developing guidelines for program usage related to best practice;
- Enhancing networking and professional development opportunities;
- Sharing methods for facilitating parent and community engagement.
- Developing district wide guidelines for assessment and evaluation.

Suggestions for this systematic approach can be gained from the literature on effective schools in disadvantaged areas and is presented below.

SYSTEMIC, CURRICULAR AND ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTIONS

Effective Schools Literature for Disadvantaged Areas

A recent systematic review of the literature on effective schools in disadvantaged areas by Muijs and colleagues (2004) supports the contention that schools in disadvantaged areas have different needs than those in more affluent neighbourhoods.¹⁶² They reviewed articles which had clear empirical evidence of school improvement in disadvantaged areas and found the following themes: a focus on teaching and learning, leadership, creating an information rich environment, creating a positive school culture, building a learning community, continuous professional development, involving parents, external support and resources. Below is a list of the key strategies used to advance student performance and achievement in disadvantaged communities identified in this review:

Table 10. Key ingredients for effective schools in disadvantaged areas as identified by Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, (2004)

Focus on teaching/learning with a strong instructional focus

- A. Effective teaching involves providing structure, ample positive reinforcement, and curriculum given in small components followed by rapid feedback
- B. Connecting learning to real life experiences and stressing practical applications, making curriculum relevant to actual life.
- C. Integrate curriculum across grades and subjects¹⁶³
- D. Arts found to be important
- E. Clear discipline procedures important for effective teaching to occur- good to have students involved in setting rules

Leadership

- A. Important variables in leadership style include: shared leadership with teaching staff, collegiality, distributed and democratic forms of leadership
- B. Use small team approach that include teacher involvement in decision-making
- C. Teacher commitment is crucial to success of the initiative
- D. Involving community members in determining effective school plans is strongly advocated¹⁶⁴
- E. Effective collaboration requires open communication where clear expectations are identified¹⁶⁵
- F. Transformational leadership and instructional leadership helps schools face challenging situations¹⁶⁶
- G. Important focus on teaching/learning, support of professional development, having and communicating a strong vision and willing to initiate change.

Create an information-rich environment

- A. Important to use data to set targets, determine decision-making and evaluate efforts
- B. Include student and teacher perspectives

Create a positive school culture

- A. Open communication
- B. Supportive leadership
- C. Having a coherent approach where students are aware of expectations and these are reflected in assessments
- D. Having high expectations (may be assisted by sharing success stories)
- E. Reducing high staff turn-over
- F. Teachers belief in the effectiveness of the intervention is vital and influences their work-rate and level of enthusiasm

Build a learning community

- A. Open communication and supportive leadership assists in elevating a blame-free culture
- B. Staff are open to change, adaptation and continuous improvement
- C. Teachers and administrators seek out and share learning through reflective dialogue
- D. "Teacher as learner" attitude and supported by professional development
- E. Spaces provided for sharing learning

- F. Look for examples of effective programs and experiment within the school; monitoring student outcomes
- G. Small team efforts with strong teacher accountability
- H. Collaboration needs to be purposeful and action-orientated
- I. Provide time for common lesson planning and collective inquiry

Continuous professional development¹⁶⁷

- A. Needs to be linked to school plan
- B. Provides practical classroom-relevant information
- C. Includes theory to foster deeper understanding
- D. Includes demonstrations
- E. Includes mentor programs that provide coaching and feedback
- F. Has concrete, hand-on training

Parental/community involvement

- A. Include parents, local businesses and social services
- B. Foster parental understanding in school curriculum and standards
- C. Provide parents with community out-reach linkages
- D. Integrate family education programs and social services
- E. Provide child care, transportation, etc

External support

- A. Network of schools that support each other (sharing ideas, disseminating good practices, providing different perspectives, creating larger professional learning communities)
- B. External support to assist schools with setting criteria, resources for professional development, assisting with data analysis and program evaluation

Sustaining improvement²³

- A. High quality staff
- B. Staff stability
- C. Clearly articulated shared values
- D. Having an academic focus
- E. Targeted coaching and mentoring
- F. Including after school programming, study skills centres, etc.
- G. Having strong external networks¹⁶⁸
- H. Teachers see methods as effective
- I. Principal manages and support change
- J. Culture of continuous professional development
- K. Active recruitment of quality staff
- L. On-going monitoring of successes¹⁶⁹
- M. Schools are learning organizations
- N. New practices are integrated into the school routine
- O. District policies support reform
- P. Collaboration and professional development are forefront
- Q. Consistency and good relations between school and district policies
- R. Supportive political context

Cultural Competency

One area not identified in the above review and relevant for the Inner City Schools Project is cultural competency in school settings. Each community is unique and needs to be considered when addressing strategies for school improvement. Productive ways of understanding issues of differences and recognizing the importance of diversity should be incorporated school wide. Research looking at schools which exhibit cultural competence have the following characteristics: having the same high academic expectations for every student, presenting a curriculum that reflects many cultures, providing ways for students and staff to deal with racial/cultural tensions, actively hiring a diverse and committed staff of educators, promoting continuous staff development, involving parents in the educational process and being sensitive to their cultural needs, and defining cultural diversity in broad terms to include diverse sexual orientations, religious traditions, age groups, and learning differences.¹⁷⁰ Attention must be paid to what Banks (2002) calls the "hidden curriculum" or implicit behaviors, messages, and structures that are conveyed in schools¹⁷¹. Further, culturally competent schools promote inclusiveness and appropriate responses to difference in their policies, programs, and practices.¹⁷²

One tool that may provide assistance for schools in evaluating their cultural competency is *The School-wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist for School Counselors (SCCOC)*.¹⁷³ This culture audit essentially serves as a comprehensive means for assessing school-wide cultural competence by identifying strengths and need areas to guide strategic planning efforts. As well as using the tool, the authors recommend collecting data from multiple sources in order to assess how well organizational policies, programs, practices, rituals, artifacts, and traditions reflect the perspectives of diverse groups. The SCCOC contains 33 items relevant to school-wide cultural competence, within eight domains: (a) school vision, (b) curriculum, (c) student interaction and leadership, (d) teachers, (e) teaching and learning, (d) parent and community outreach, (e) conflict management, and (f) assessments. The authors provide the following recommendations for improving cultural competency in schools:

A) **Work collaboratively** with school principals to assess school-wide cultural competence;

(B) Identify a **diverse team of teacher leaders** and other stakeholders to assist in the assessment;

(C) **Use a research-based instrument** such as the SCCOC to determine strength and need areas in school-wide cultural competence;

(D) Include activities in the comprehensive guidance program to **address the cultural competence need** areas of the school such as providing group counseling for minority students who might be able to qualify for honors or gifted programs with additional support, offering support groups for marginalized youth such as gay, lesbian, or questioning youth, and developing a prevention program for conflicts arising from cultural differences;

(E) **Become knowledgeable about racial identity development** and include this knowledge in the comprehensive guidance program through classroom guidance lessons, small group sessions, staff development, and school programs designed to enhance the understanding of the impact that race and ethnicity have on child development; and

(F) **Model cultural competence** and challenge inequitable organizational policies and practices.

A Methodology for Enacting School Change

As vital as determining **what** is important for effective schools in disadvantaged areas is knowing **how** to effect change. Lewis (2006)¹⁷⁴ presents a whole school change process of an elementary school in Sydney, Australia located in an area of social disadvantage. This research evaluation describes the guidelines developed, a research framework that envisioned a successful school and principally, how the school effected positive literacy and behavioral change in their students. The underlying basis for the project was a methodology developed by the Leadership Research Institute at the University of Southern Queensland and Education Queensland called *The IDEAS Project*. The *IDEAS Project*, based on research sources focused on school successes in disadvantages areas includes: *A Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes*, a five-phase implementation strategy called the *Ideas Process* and a method of parallel leadership that supports the change. Using the *Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes* as an underlying set of guidelines, the project embraced the importance of having: strategic foundations, a cohesive community, a 3-dimensional pedagogy and infrastructural design. Each of these elements are defined by easy to understand questions and the necessary professional supports to implement them. For example, strategic foundations includes the following questions:

- Is the school vision clear and meaningful?
- Is leadership distributed?

- Are successes capitalized upon to enhance the school's identity and ethos?
- Are decision-making processes shared and transparent?
- Is the school's conceptualization of education promoted in the community?

All of the elements of the *Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes* are tied to measurable school outcomes including student achievement, professional learning, school-community relationships and sustainability. Using the *Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes* as a set of underlying guidelines, the *IDEA Process* provides the method for developing a pedagogical framework using a series of guiding questions during five phases. These include: **Initiating** (How will we manage the process? Who will facilitate the process? Who will record the history of our journey?); **Discovering** (What are we doing that is most successful? What is not working as well as we would like?); **Envisioning** (What do we hope our school will look like in the future? What is our conceptualization of schoolwide pedagogy?); **Actioning** (How can we create a tripartite plan? How will we work toward the alignment of key school elements and processes?); and, **Sustaining** (What progress have we made toward schoolwide pedagogy? What school practices are succeeding and how can we expand them?).

Using these as theoretical guides, Lewis describes how one school's staff, students and parent community developed a vision and pedagogical framework, which in turn influenced and improved the school culture, teacher expectations of student achievements, professional communication and consensus building. Central to this process was the development of a School Management Team dedicated to the guidelines and process. The management team consisted of teacher leaders who worked in parallel with administrative leaders and middle managers to translate the vision and pedagogical framework into workable classroom and school practices. Over time, this resulted in a collaborative, teacher-driven approach to classroom practices that supported the vision; where teachers assumed and shared responsibility for school change.

The evaluative process consisted of qualitative assessments of school culture across a two year period that the IDEAS's Project was developed and instituted. Key factors of success identified in this evaluation included: shared leadership between administration and teachers, daily literacy and numeracy blocks to instill basic skills,

strong and supportive administrative leadership, a common vision and high expectations for student achievement, facilitators dedicated to enacting the process and increased levels of trust and engagement.

In sum, knowing what is important and how to make changes for effective schools in disadvantaged areas from the research examined above, provided recommendations related to school culture, leadership, policy and procedures, instructional pedagogy, cultural competence, professional development, parent and community engagement and organizational practice.

Identifying Effective School Practices in the Inner City Schools Project: Key Informant Interview and Principals' Focus Group

It is also important to determine effective school practices in the Inner City Schools from a variety of perspectives. The following key informant interview provides systemic recommendations from the perspective of a past member of the District Management Team who helped develop the program and worked within the Inner City Schools.

VSB Key Informant Interview

What recommendations would you suggest for improving the inner city schools?

The whole program needs to do a re-purposing. Need to have an intensive dialogue around the common purpose of program, mission, and common values. No one school is the same as the other and we need to clarify what outcomes we want.

How do we accomplish this?

1. From a structural perspective, **look at differentiation in the inner city schools**. Every school has the same positions and amount of money. **Conduct role clarification of the positions.**
2. **Training should be provided for principals before taking on inner city schools.**
3. From a supportive position- **a single superintendent position responsible for inner city schools and community linkages should be created** (done in Alberta).
4. Look at staffing. Kids need relationships. Is self-selection what we want for those highly vulnerable kids? **Teachers hired in these schools should have at least 5 years experience.**
5. Not enough professional learning around inner city. Groups of teachers sharing ideas, resources.... Successes from one school can be shared and transferred to other schools. **Promote idea sharing at the inner city conference- share successes and methods.**

What worked really well for kids?

1. **Have staff seriously take on a common purpose-** Schools which work hard on literacy, social responsibility and nurturing (with a really professional ethic and focus). **Leadership and having the right people are vital.**
2. **Use time effectively-** actual focused academic time, enrichment but also **really important is out of school time (3:30-5:30 pm)**. Kept kids safe, busy... have a menu of after school programming such as fine arts, sports, homework clubs. Work really well with community centre. E.g., **Have support workers/teacher stagger their hours so they can sometimes work 12-6 pm. Ensure schools properly use their community link funds- focus funding in after school programs.** Best community link teams are using good models- using peer mentoring. Secondary students to help run program.
3. **Connect with community opportunities.** For example, the Sara McLaughlin Music society
4. **Support school hubs.** Hubs are vital in connecting schools at different levels as well as with the community.
5. **Coordinate programming,** e.g., Some schools have a great sports program, others have fantastic arts programming, etc.
6. **Support and work with community centres,** e.g., Strathcona does so much for kids- it has an amazing coordinator.

As well, a focus group was conducted with 9 Principals and one Vice Principal, representing 9 of the 12 Inner City Schools. They were asked to identify what changes in the Inner City Project model could be made to improve outcomes for vulnerable children?

Principals' Focus Group Results

(not prioritized)

- Flexibility in hiring and in hours
- Input into posting i.e. 5 year minimum experience
- Some flexibility in staff assignments
- Definition of role – accountability
- Flexible term of role with possible extensions
- Flexibility in hours of operation and program space
- More area counselor time to support mental health
- Access to service for mental health
- Broaden goal from language development to literacy
- Framework /network of resources – info on resources for new inner city principals

- Each inner city team will work with school on school's goals
- Integration of inner city goals with school goals and needs of the community
- Flexibility and fluidity of roles to emerging needs
- School decisions on allocation and nature of roles for teams and staff
- Capacity for long term planning
- Staff continuity for long term planning
- Equity of staffing for size of school
- Closer partnership between community school teams and school based teams
- Sufficient staff for other needs beyond goals
- Support for transition times for students
- Programs to drive staffing; not staffing driving programs
- Options/ choices on programs for early intervention like neighbourhoods of learning to share early learning
- Be cautious about taking away community link support or funding
- Preserve space for early learning programs in the education facilities review process

Both the Key Informant Interview and Principals' focus group recommended flexibility in staffing, clearer role definitions, coordinated program planning, continuity for staff and strengthening partnerships with community.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the recommendations for positive change identified in the research were also suggested by individuals associated with the Inner City Schools. This result stresses the importance of acquiring experiential knowledge from all individuals impacted. The students and parents, in particular, provided some valuable suggestions for improvement for programming that was quite different from school staff. Taking an assets-based perspective allowed the identification of needs and supports in a positive and effective manner. Huge diversity exists across the 12 schools with regard to programming, with each acting as its own 'silo'. Concerted effort in coordinating programming, developing guidelines across schools and providing opportunities for information sharing, training and networking will provide

support to the staff, families and community agencies making a difference in these children's lives.

SYSTEMIC, CURRICULAR AND ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

From a structural perspective, *look at differentiation in the Inner City Schools*. At the same time, consider coordinating programming, networking, training, and professional development **across** all Inner City Schools.

1. Re-evaluate the mission, purpose of the Inner City Program, common values and the roles and responsibilities of the positions attached to it
2. Review funding allocation based on school size and outside support such as the *Community Link* Program to ensure there is not duplication of resources
3. Consider creating a position responsible for Inner City Schools and community linkages
4. Focus on team building and coordination across programming such as developing networking, training, dedicated time, and guidelines for best practice
5. Ensure those working in the inner city schools are experienced (at least 5 years) and for principals, have additional training
6. Encourage staff consistency in the Inner City Schools (e.g. minimum 5 years) to promote continuity of relationships with students, parents, staff and community agencies
7. Consider funding /support for best practice programs and encourage multiple schools use the same programming to provide support, mentoring, etc.
8. Adopt the *Inner City Schools Literacy Plan*.
- 9 Adopt the *Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum* across all Inner City schools
10. Support more networking opportunities between staff to share successes and ideas as well as provide support across the Inner City schools
11. Use the Inner City Schools conference as a venue for highlighting effective practices amongst those working in the Inner City Schools, families and community
12. Ensure that reviews of the Inner City Schools include feedback from the teachers, support workers, parents, community partners and students
13. Develop district wide guidelines for assessment and evaluation

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING LITERACY

Inner City School Literacy Plan

Important elements of this plan would include the following:

1. Place an emphasis on early intervention programming
2. Use a multi-tiered approach to identifying and addressing ability level needs
3. Adopt a collaborative model that supports integrated literacy activity of different roles within schools, in relation to assessment, instruction and evaluation
4. Ensure district wide support of programs that are evidence based in relation to training, financial and human support and professional development
 - Provide opportunities for networking across all Inner City Schools
 - Provide continued support for family involvement/programming
 - Develop a coordinated plan for involving community in supporting literacy initiatives during out-of-school hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

A Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

1. Conduct a SEL needs assessment for all schools within the Inner City Project.
2. Provide teachers/support worker with emotional competency training through professional development efforts.
3. Develop a VSB district wide policy that supports SEL programming in each grade-- that includes both school-wide and program SEL training, ensuring that all core competencies are addressed (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making), includes components involving families and communities, and guidelines for assessment and outside referral.

Example:

A Developmentally-based Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

- K- *Roots of Empathy*
- 1- Emotional literacy (*PATHS*)
- 2- Problem-solving (*Restorative Justice*)
- 3. Emotional literacy " *Wits*"
- 4. *Roots of Empathy*

5. Anti-bullying "*Steps to Success*"
6. Conflict resolution
7. Leadership training and community service and learning

Meanwhile, schools should continue whole school efforts such as code of conduct, peer mediation, guest lecturers, student recognition, after school clubs, and out of school programs.

4. Facilitate networking opportunities for all individuals working on SEL across the Inner City Schools.
5. Support SEL efforts by providing training in implementation, assessment and evaluation.
6. Develop a multi-discipline SEL approach within schools and across the Inner City schools.
7. Develop a program for engaging and providing SEL information to parents.
8. Develop a coordinated approach with community agencies to support SEL in out of school hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Establish of a parent center, a home visitor program, and action research teams in order to promote parent involvement
- Reaching out to all families, not just those most easily contacted, and involving them in all major roles, from tutoring to governance
- Provide parent education information and training opportunities
- Provide family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services
- Provide networks to link all families with parent representatives, information about community services, etc.
- Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building
- Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs
- Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school

- Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress
- Recruit and organize parent help and support
- Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning
- Involve families and their children in all important curriculum-related decisions
- Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
- Ensure active parent advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation
- Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school
- Offer training and/or honorariums to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents (e.g., translation services)
- Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups
- Provide cultural event opportunities
- Ensure support is available for participation such as child minding
- Activities which help support parent involvement
- Encourage parents' involvement in classes
- Ensure afterschool programs are available
- Provide spaces for programming for out-of-school learning
- Develop a Parent Mentor program
- Develop mechanism for information sharing about resources and programs to all IC school parents
- Continue fun events with food (community cultural fair, potlucks)
- Provide flexible staff hours

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Share resources with community agencies
- Promote out-of-school learning
- Develop cooperative/joint funding applications
- Providing services to families (e.g., child minding)
- Extended school staff hours
- Providing fun and exciting programs
- Provide training to staff

- Provide access to schools on weekends and evenings
- Provide knowledge of community agency/services to families
- Share information about children to better meet their needs
- Increase capacity building with families
- Formalize relationship to enhance information sharing, communication and collaboration
- Budget for out of school learning
- Provide structured feedback from schools to community agencies
- Continue to support creative/flexible solutions
- Increase school staffing
- Involve community staff in school conferences, workshops, meetings that serve Inner City kids
- Ensure consistency in school staffing to support relationships
- Dedicate a position for school-community collaboration
- Have regular meetings
- Provide more resources (financial/equipment)
- Recognize barriers to collaboration and address them
- Conduct a needs assessment of community services
- Allow greater presence in schools

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Provide a clear description of programming, resources required and percentage of time required
- Collect baseline data by grade in the Fall
- Collect post program data by grade at the end of Spring
- Provide qualitative evaluation/impressions of programming successes and lessons learned provided by each support worker/teacher
- Provide rationale for new planning decisions based on evidence
- School district to provide a template of a good review
- Provide a description of the programs used
- Use consistency in data measures to compare different schools/programs, e.g., DRA, FSA
- Use consistency in what is measured, e.g., #maintaining, meeting or exceeding expectations
- Use consistency in when measurements are taken. E.g. Same year- Spring-Fall
- Identify teacher professional development and resource support required

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