2022

Increasing Alignment Between Community Collaboratives and Schools

Out of School Time Collaborative

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1.   Introduction

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in restrictions around the world and, consequently, changed the way community and education programs are delivered. The pandemic has highlighted the need for community organizations and schools to increase alignment with one another through coordinated efforts to better serve Edmonton's children and youth.

The **purpose** of this document is to outline ways in which youth-focused collaborations can facilitate a greater collective effort to provide support for Edmonton students.[1] The community collaboratives that this report focuses on are *All In For Youth: OST Collaborative; Bridging Together; Youth Services Coordination; Access to Technology and Digital Literacy; Computers for Students; Education and E-Learning*; and *Middle Years OST Natural Supports Project*.

We recognize that schools are doing everything they can to support children and youth with the limited time and resources they have. This document identifies issues that are preventing children and youth from receiving adequate support, as well as areas we can improve if we work together. We also have included a preliminary section that highlights some of the complexities faced by schools. By addressing the barriers faced by schools, organizations, and the students we all serve, we can do better for students.

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[1] See Appendix B for the list of collaborations and their associated partner organizations.

2. **Community Collaboratives**

01. *All In For Youth* and the *OST Collaborative*

i) *All In For Youth*

What this group does

Located in five inner-city schools, All in for Youth (AIFY) brings together local services to help address the complex needs that children and families experience when living with low income. AIFY is focused on increasing high school completion rates by supporting youth on their educational journey and developing students' and families' individual capacity. All in for Youth serves as an exemplar for the success communities and schools can have in communities when working together.

ii) *OST Collaboratie*

What this group does

The Out of School Time (OST) Collaborative operates as part of AIFY to offer support for OST service providers in the form of training, resource sharing, and networking opportunities. OST groups provide programming to vulnerable school-aged children and youth during the times when they are not in school (before and after school, winter and spring breaks, summer holidays). The support provided by these groups aims to provide children and youth with academic support, mentorship, recreational opportunities, and connection. The goal is that these programs will offer support for children and youth to attain academic success, build meaningful relationships, become more resilient, and achieve their goals. Because the OST membership is broad, not all OST members have the same level of collaboration with schools as the All in for Youth partnership.

Recommendations

- Increased presence of social agencies to work collaboratively in schools where there are no social agencies present.
- Increased level and quality of communication between schools and OST programs about events, programs, opportunities, issues, families, etc.
- Information sharing between schools and OST programs about students, the issues they may be facing in school and at home, and opportunities for the schools and OST program to work together to support that child/family.
- Equity in access to Joint Use Summer Access space for groups running summer programs to help prevent the loss of learning that children and youth often experience over the summer holidays.
- Support from school administration for the OST program to be able to run efficiently and provide the best possible program.
- Opportunities and resources for OST groups to be able to support families and facilitate communication between families and schools.

02. *Bridging Together* and *Youth Services Coordination*

i) *Bridging Together*

What this group does

In 2020, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) requested that REACH Edmonton undertake a coordinating role within the newcomer sector and, as part of that role, map all child and youth programs in Edmonton. This mapping work began in the summer of 2020 with the goal of providing an easily accessible and user-friendly map that captures essential details of child and youth programs. This map will be made available to the public and updated three times each year to help improve program referrals, identify geographical areas of need for youth programing, help families connect to programs, support youth organizations' applications for funding, and ensure sufficient coverage of child and youth programs across the city.

What this group does

The Youth Services Coordination committee is a group of IRCC-funded, newcomer children and youth service providers. This committee meets each month to share program updates and resources. It is also working towards improving client referrals among one another, and with non-immigrant serving organizations and institutions.

Recommendations

One barrier to mapping services and ensuring services are located in areas where there is equitable access to supports is that service providers do not have access to information about populations of newcomer families. To support organizations in their pursuit of the goals outlined above, we suggest that we work together to share information such as newcomer population trends between schools and organizations so that we can collectively ensure that no newcomer child is without access to any form of support they may need in their evolving settlement journey.

- Sharing data with REACH and the Youth Services Coordination committee about newcomer populations in schools.
- ·Improved referrals from schools to community serving organizations.

03. Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership: *Access to Technology and Digital Literacy; Computers for Students* and *Education and E-Learning Collaboratives*

As the world moved online in March 2020, schools reacted quickly and efficiently to lend devices to students so they could continue their studies online under the guidance of their teachers. We commend schools for acting quickly to support the children and youth in Edmonton. However, we also recognize that this shift to virtual learning did not come without its challenges for schools, organizations working to support students, and the children and their families.

i) *Access to Technology and Digital Literacy*

What this group does

The Access to Technology and Digital Literacy committee first met in May 2020 after many organizations were hearing from the families they work with about issues such as not having enough devices for individual households, needing affordable access to internet, and requiring assistance navigating how to join school sessions or online homework clubs. This group met on a frequent basis to share best practices, challenges, successes, resources, and other information. Partners quickly realized that access to technology and supporting digital literacy were complex issues, and that in order to work towards changing circumstances for students, we needed to take a wholistic approach to addressing these challenges.

ii) *Computers for Students*

What this group does

The Computers for Students (C4S) collaborative is a branch of Access to Technology and Digital Literacy. C4S came together in August 2020 with the goal of working together to get devices such as Chromebooks and laptops into the hands of students who need them most. To date, we have developed shared criteria for assessing who devices should go to first and have collaboratively distributed over 450 devices.

After the United Way and partner organizations facilitated distribution of laptops to families in the spring of 2020, the C4S committee released a survey to recipient families the following October. The purpose of that survey was to better understand the impact that a device had on a family during the pandemic. The results showed that the top three benefits of the devices were helping children and adults with schoolwork and online learning, connecting students with their friends and family, and helping online learners access more resources. You can view the Impact Survey Results here.

iii) *Education and E-Learning*

What this group does

The Education and E-Learning committee assembled in April 2020 and is led by ELIP. This group meets frequently, as organizations work hard to navigate issues related to online learning, and discusses best practices, challenges, successes, resources, and other information. This ELIP committee has also conducted in-depth research about the relationship between schools and community agencies with the purpose of imagining better outcomes for newcomer students and families.[2]

Recommendations

- Alignment with emergency responses, specifically in relation to technology.
- Increased level and quality of communication between schools and community agencies about events, programs, opportunities, issues, families, etc.
- Information sharing between schools and community agencies about students, the issues they may be facing in school and at home, and opportunities for the schools and community agencies to work together to support that child/family.
- Support from school administration for community agency programs to be able to run efficiently and provide the best possible program.
- Opportunities and resources for community agencies to be able to support families and facilitate communication between families and schools.

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[2] See Kanopy Consulting's *Invoking the Village: Enhancing Collaboration Between Schools and Community Agencies to Support Newcomers.*

04. *Middle Years OST Natural Supports Project*

What this group does

The Middle Years Out School Time Natural Supports (MYOSTNS) project has developed a framework for implementing natural supportive relationships during the middle-years of childhood.[3] The middle years are considered to be between the ages of 6 and 13. The framework, in part, provides critical insight into existing policies and practices related to how Out of School Time programs are delivered to children in their middle years.

For a brief overview of the MYOSTNS's project, watch this video.

Recommendations

- Recognition of the MYOSTNS framework.
- Alignment with emergency responses.
- Greater communication at a community level between schools and community programs. Information sharing on community events, cultural events, OST programs, etc. [4]

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[3] See page 2 in *Policy and Practice Framework – Supporting Middle Years OST Through Natural Supports Approaches.*

[4] *Ibid* at 23.

3.   Additional Considerations

Teachers and school staff see firsthand the positive impact community partners have on students. Existing relationships between community partners, such as the ones identified in this document, and schools are valuable because the community's expert knowledge and experience provides special insight into difficult subjects that schools may not be equipped to deal with. Community organizations also recognize that staff within the school system have demanding workloads and competing priorities but are always thinking first about what is best for students. This dedication was especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when staff worked tirelessly to support the students.

With that said, our school-based colleagues have limited resources. Realistically, any proposals to expand the responsibilities of our school colleagues will likely involve an increased financial burden. To fully achieve the outlined efficiencies in this document, schools may need additional resources. Any plans to acquire additional funding will likely need to involve provincial and federal representatives. While the IRCC's funding of Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) and the joint commitment of Alberta's Ministry of Children Services and the Ministry of Education for Success in Schools provide important resources for school boards to deliver services to vulnerable children, more is likely needed to fully succeed in meeting the needs of Edmonton students.

Recommendations

- School districts need funding to do this work.
- Solutions need to be identified in tandem with federal and provincial representatives.
- Need a full picture of what is already occurring in schools.

4.   Conclusion

We come to you not having all the answers but having identified areas that can be improved to support a way forward. By addressing these barriers for organizations, schools, and the students we all serve, we can all do better for students.

Appendix A

Summary of Recommendations

Information Sharing between schools and community collaboratives	Processes	• Increased level and quality of communication between schools and OST programs and community agencies about events, programs, opportunities, issues, families, etc. • Alignment with emergency responses generally and specifically in relation to technology. • Greater communication at a community level between schools and community programs. Information sharing on community events, cultural events, OST programs, etc. • Need a full picture of what is already occurring in schools.
Information Sharing between schools and community collaboratives	Client	• Information sharing between schools and OST programs and community agencies about students, the issues they may be facing in school and at home, and opportunities for the schools and OST program/community agency to work together to support that child/family.
	Resrouces	• Opportunities and resources for OST groups and community programs to be able to support families and facilitate communication between families and schools. • Sharing data with REACH and the Youth Services Coordination committee about newcomer populations in schools.
Increased Support	Between schools and community collaboratives	• Support from school administration for the OST program and community agencies to be able to run efficiently and provide the best possible programs. • Equity in access to Joint Use Summer Access space for groups running summer programs to help prevent the loss of learning that children and youth often experience over the summer holidays. • Improved referrals from schools to community serving organizations. • Recognition of the MYOSTNS framework.
	Between schools and government bodies	• School districts need funding to do this work. • Solutions need to be identified in tandem with federal and provincial representatives.

Appendix B

Partners

Access to Technology and Digital Literacy
- Action for Healthy Communities
- Catholic Social Services
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
- Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Social Planning Council
- Edmonton Public Library
- The Family Centre
- Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle
- Islamic Family and Social Services Association
- Multicultural Family Resource Society
- Multicultural Heath Brokers Cooperative
- NorQuest College
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- Somali Canadian Women and Children Association
- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

All In For Youth
- Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area
- City of Edmonton
- E4C
- Edmonton Catholic School District
- Edmonton Community Foundation
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Public School Board
- The Family Centre
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

Bridging Together – OST – Mapping
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- Out of School Time Steering Committee

Computers for Students
- Catholic Social Services
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

Education and E-Learning
- Action for Healthy Communities
- Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area
- Council for the Advancement of African Canadians
- Edmonton Catholic School District
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Public School Board
- The Family Centre
- Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle
- Islamic Family and Social Services Association
- Kanopy Consulting
- Multicultural Family Resource Society
- Multicultural Heath Brokers Cooperative
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- Somali Canadian Women and Children Association
- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

Middle Years OST Natural Supports (MYOSTNS)
- Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area
- Max Bell Foundation
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities

Out of School Time Collaborative (OST)
- Council for the Advancement of African Canadians
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area
- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton Catholic School District
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Public School Board
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
- Child and youth serving community organizations

Youth Services Coordination
- Action for Healthy Communities
- Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area
- Catholic Social Services
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- Somali Canadian Women and Children Association