

Reducing inequities in children's educational success and family well-being in marginalized communities through innovation in public education

Study overview

The *'Reducing inequities in children's educational success and family well-being in marginalized communities through innovation in public education'* research project investigates how the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) comprehensive, multi-pronged, system focused, and holistic Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) initiative works and what initial conditions and program features help contribute to sustainable improvements in students' educational success and the well-being of students and families living in marginalized communities. This community-partnered study helps school boards to

find solutions around setting direction for support services to meet the educational success and well-being (e.g., physical development, language, cognitive, social, and emotional development) of children and families living in marginalized communities. The findings will support timely TDSB-wide system improvement. This study will have implications for reducing inequities in children's educational success and well-being, for parent engagement and services for families, as well as educational practice and policy within school boards across Canada.

Context

In an effort to level the playing field for all students, the TDSB's MSIC initiative was launched in 2006 in response to recommendations outlined by the TDSB's 2005 Inner City Task Force Report that called on the TDSB to develop "a systemic approach to address the impact of poverty on student outcomes and the issue of achievement gaps experienced by historically marginalized groups" (p. 66)¹. The MSIC initiative aims to reduce inequities and achievement gaps for students in low socioeconomic communities by providing additional supports for schools in communities with the highest needs. From piloting the MSIC initiative at three schools in 2006, the initiative has grown to include 150 MSIC schools in 2012-13, serving over 56 000 students in low socioeconomic communities¹. The MSIC initiative strives to support equal opportunities for all students regardless of sociodemographic status through school-based services. Grounded in maintaining high expectations for students and promoting a vision of achieving excellence, the MSIC initiative is guided by five essential components²:

1. Innovation in teaching and learning practices
2. Support services to meet the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students (including nutrition and after-school programs)
3. Supporting the view of school as the heart of the community
4. Frequent research, review, and evaluation of students and program effectiveness
5. Commitment to share successful practices

The MSIC initiative offers a variety of services and supports for MSIC schools, including additional school funding, additional health and educational support services (e.g., nutrition programs, in-school health clinics³ that do not require OHIP cards to access), and the initiatives to facilitate school partnerships with families, community groups, and organizations. Although each MSIC school has its own individual programming plans to meet the unique needs of its students and families, all are grounded in the MSIC initiative's essential components and philosophy. Supports for families at MSIC schools include Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs, now referred to as EarlyON Centres), which are school-based drop-in programs for parents with young children. PFLCs aim to create a sense of community, act as a central resource for parenting strategies, and provide families support and access to community services and settlement agencies⁴. Through the MSIC Parent Academy initiative, parent representatives organize and offer locally relevant parenting workshops (topics include child development, mental health, nutrition, anti-bullying, and internet safety, among others), workforce development workshops (topics include upgrading qualifications, food handling certificate course, resume building, interview skills, computer skills), along with a variety of events to support families in learning how to navigate the education system in Canada.

Our approach

To investigate how the MSIC initiative works and its approach to supporting equity in children's educational success and family well-being, we will be collecting primary and secondary qualitative data from parents, students, and school board staff. While there is evidence of the efficacy of the MSIC initiative in reducing students' opportunity gap in MSIC schools, there is less research evidence of what the mediating and moderating circumstances are around the program outcomes for students and how the initiative supports parents' well-being, settlement, and engagement in their child's schooling.

Working in collaboration with our partner at the TDSB, this research will involve:

- Secondary analysis of qualitative data, including child and staff focus group and interview data collected at five MSIC school sites over time
- New key informant interviews conducted with school board staff
- New focus groups with parents at five school sites

Knowledge mobilization

After data collection is complete, we will focus on sharing our results with the study participants, school community members (families, staff), other key stakeholders, and the broader public. We will share our findings in the following ways:

- Knowledge mobilization meetings with stakeholders
- Community and scholarly reports
- Creation of summaries of findings for circulation
- Community and scholarly presentations of findings

Study team

Dr. Sejal Patel, Associate Professor, Early Childhood Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University

Maria Yau, Research Coordinator, Research & Development, Toronto District School Board

Dr. Patricia O'Campo, Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

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Reducing Inequities in Children's Educational Success and Well-Being in Marginalized Communities Through Innovation in Public Education
(Awarded to Dr. Sejal Patel [PI], Dr. Patricia O'Campo [Co-I] and Maria Yau [Collaborator])

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE: THE RBC IMMIGRANT, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PROJECT

Supporting Greater Equity in Families' Involvement, Settlement, and Well-Being in Inner City Schools
(Awarded to Dr. Sejal Patel [PI] and Maria Yau [Community Partner])

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2. Toronto District School Board. (2005, May). Model Schools for Inner Cities task force report. Retrieved February 13, 2019 from: <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/Community/ModelSchools/InnerCityReportMay2005.pdf>
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Early Childhood Studies**
Faculty of Community Services

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Dr. Sejal Patel, Associate Professor
patel.sejal@ryerson.ca