

HEQCO

Access and Retention Consortium

‘Equity in Education’: Collective Impact Initiative (Pathways to Education)

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Overview

The Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC) has been working in collaboration with various stakeholders across Ottawa, Ontario, Canada to establish a collective impact initiative to address the inequities in academic achievement amongst low-income communities throughout the city. The initiative, Equity in Education (EiE), aims to use a collective impact approach to find innovative ways to build off the success of the highly successful Pathways to Education program (of which PQCHC is the host agency in Ottawa).

The first year of the EiE initiative consisted primarily of convening stakeholders to determine potential areas of collaboration that would produce mutually reinforcing activities. Through this work, the need for a Student Parent Support Worker (SPSW) to coordinate wraparound/holistic services for youth and act as the liaison between youth, their families, schools and community organizations became apparent. Over the last year, EiE was able to fund a pilot project that examined this role in a community context.

The pilot was a great initial prototype for the initiative as the SPSW acts as a system navigator. The SPSW is responsible for understanding the strengths and needs of the youth, what assets and resources are available for the youth and also what gaps in service delivery are experienced by the youth and their families that create barriers to success. This pilot provided a tangible intervention to engage stakeholders in the collective impact process; and helped develop a collective understanding of what systems- and policy-level changes would need to be in place to move the work of EiE forward in a sustainable way.

The goal of this project is to evaluate the systems-level effects that three pilot projects (scaled from the initial SPSW pilot) will have on EiE and its stakeholders, and their potential to influence postsecondary access rates for youth in low-income communities in Ottawa. This project seeks to describe how both academic outcomes *and* systems-level effects are influenced by the EiE initiative.

Evaluation questions:

1. What are the critical elements of the Equity in Education (EiE) initiative, and how do these align with the five conditions of collective impact — a common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, shared measurement, the presence of a backbone organization?
2. How have the three pilot projects (processes of pilot development and emerging findings re: student outcomes) influenced the direction and work of EiE over the time period of the project?

3. What have been the barriers and facilitating factors to EiE engaging and building trusting relationships and capacity amongst stakeholders from multiple sectors?
4. To what extent has EiE influenced changes in awareness, service delivery and organizational practice among stakeholders to address the educational achievement gaps and postsecondary enrolment rates of disadvantaged students in the pilot communities (e.g., through shared resources, coordinated processes, new partnerships/collaboration)?
5. What has been learned about how systems-level factors can contribute to students' academic engagement/success and goal attainment?

Methodology and Timeline

To address the evaluation questions noted above, evaluators will employ a single-case study design with four embedded units of analysis: one for each of the three pilots and one for the overall EiE collective impact (CI) initiative which includes all of the services, agencies and systems that interact with the EiE initiative within and across the three EiE pilot sites. The context for the case is the City of Ottawa.

Embedded units of analysis in this case — the three clusters of neighborhood agencies/organizations and stakeholders involved with each EiE pilot, along with the overarching cluster of agencies and systems that comprise the broader EiE collective impact initiative — allow us to understand processes and outcomes at multiple levels of governance. This project will explore how having the EiE pilots as central focal points will influence the CI process and, in turn, how this may relate to both outcomes of the CI approach and outcomes within the pilot sites.

Contact Information

For more specific information about this project or for any questions, please contact Helen Tewolde, Senior Researcher and Manager, Centre for Equitable Access at HEQCO (htewolde@heqco.ca), or James Thibeault, Project Manager, Equity in Education, Pathways to Education (j.thibeault@pgchc.com).