

HEQCO

Access and Retention Consortium Success Beyond Limits (SBL)

Success Beyond Limits Graduation Model

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Overview

Young people growing up and attending school in the Jane and Finch area of Toronto face barriers related to the social, structural, political and historical conditions that have developed over the past four decades. Developed in 2010, the Success Beyond Limits (SBL) Graduation Model aims to improve educational outcomes, expand possibilities and support youth in the Jane and Finch community along their individual paths to success, while keeping youth voice at the forefront of both SBL's model and mandate. SBL's Graduation Model has a number of different components including a summer program, a school year program, a March Break program and an EXPOSE stream. Starting in the summer after Grade 8, SBL students have the opportunity to participate in all programming throughout high school. Students receive academic support, mentorship, access to extracurricular activities and exposure to a postsecondary environment (York University). The Graduation Model is designed to build leadership capacity through gradual change; as students progress through high school, they become mentors to younger students in the program. Through the programming, supports and relationships developed with youth in Jane and Finch, SBL aims to address the complex problem of achievement and opportunity gaps.

SBL is conducting an evaluation of the impact of its Graduation Model on postsecondary trajectories and pathways. Specifically, the evaluation looks at how SBL's graduation model and programming have influenced students' access to, and their decision making around, postsecondary education (PSE).

The evaluation seeks to answer the following four evaluation questions:

1. Has participation in the SBL program influenced students' postsecondary pathways and/or trajectories? If so, how and why?
2. Has participation in SBL influenced students' PSE attainment? If so, how and why?
3. How has participating in SBL changed students' aspirations about PSE pathways? And to what extent are these changes in PSE aspiration related to their postsecondary trajectories and PSE attendance?
4. How has participating in SBL changed students' relationships with their peers and community? To what extent are these changes in relationships related to their postsecondary trajectories and PSE attendance?

Methodology and Timeline

Given SBL's mandate to keep youth voices at the forefront of the Graduation Model, the evaluation involves Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). YPAR is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles like equity, anti-oppression and diversity, in which young people are trained to conduct research to improve their lives, communities and the institutions intended to serve them.

This study will take place over three years and will involve two main research activities: a broad-based survey and alumni interviews.

The broad-based survey will be distributed to all SBL alumni in June 2018. It will ask past participants about their level of involvement in SBL programming, their postsecondary trajectory, the relationships they formed through SBL and relevant demographic information. The results of the survey will be used to inform the interview protocol.

The alumni interviews will be conducted through the YPAR process. Youth researchers will be recruited from SBL alumni and they will receive training to build their capacity in research, with a focus on interviewing for the purposes of data collection. Once they have been trained, the youth researchers will collaboratively create the interview protocol and research plan. The purpose of the interviews will be to learn more about whether SBL played a role in the postsecondary outcomes of alumni, why a particular postsecondary trajectory was chosen, and what role SBL played in the perception of PSE and the perceived available PSE choices. The youth researchers will then interview SBL alumni in August–September of 2018. Followup interviews will be conducted in July–August of 2019 and 2020, while youth researchers will also capture new alumni perspectives in the second and third round of interviews.

An annual report will be published in February each year of the study, detailing interim results. A final report outlining the results from the survey and interviews, with a focus on the school-community experiences of SBL youth and the impact the SBL Graduation model has had on the secondary school outcomes and PSE trajectories of SBL alumni will be published in April 2021.

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 Tesfai Mengesha, Executive Director, Operations, Success Beyond Limits (t.mengesha@successbl.com).