



When Children Succeed, We Break the Cycle of Poverty

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS IN NEW BRUNSWICK

In 2018, a 3-year demonstration project was established to close the education achievement gap for K to 2 students in seven Saint John schools with high concentrations of child poverty, and use the learnings to help improve education outcomes province-wide.

This update highlights the key results from the initial one-and-a-half years of the project, prior to the pandemic. It also discusses the impact of COVID-19 and the project's go-forward priorities.

PROJECT UPDATE #3 WINTER 2021 3-YEAR DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

PROJECT TIMELINE



Year One

September 2018 - June 2019



Year Two

September 2019 – June 2020
Pandemic closed schools Mar-June.



Year Three

September 2020 - June 2021
The pandemic paused the project for the full school year.



CONTEXT

Project Rationale

Poverty is a major negative influence on a child's educational attainment, and is a key factor that must be addressed to improve education outcomes and establish a thriving economy. High-performing education systems strive for every child's education success, and invest in closing the education achievement gap for children who need more help. The results produce lifetime benefits for the children and an impressive return on investment.

This project is a vital component of a comprehensive strategy in Saint John that for the past 20 years has engaged the broader community – all sectors – in ending generational poverty. Helping every child succeed in school by closing the achievement gap for children who live in poverty is a primary goal. This project is complemented by other strategies that attend to the children's basic needs and enrich their educational experiences, from cradle to career.

Project Purpose

New Brunswick recognizes that poverty is a primary barrier to children's education success. This 3-year project aims to demonstrate how schools with high concentrations of poverty can be resourced to close the achievement gap in the earliest grades – the foundational years that are critical to a child's ability to successfully progress in school and life.

Project Objectives

Short term (within 3 years) – Close the achievement gap for 1,000 K-2 children who live in poverty.

Longer term – Learnings from the project will inform and strengthen public policy and practices, to improve education outcomes and end generational poverty in New Brunswick.

Project Description

- Reduce the teacher-student ratio in K to 2 classrooms to 1:12 to enable each child to receive intensive, individualized help to overcome learning barriers caused by socio-economic disadvantages and acquire the basic social and academic skills that drive progressive school success.
- Document the progress of the children using quantitative and qualitative measures.
- Engage parents in their children's education success and document these results.
- Capture best practices and changes in teaching methods and

their impact, create a positive feedback loop for the project, and inform public policy and education practice in New Brunswick.



HIGHLIGHTS – PROJECT FINDINGS (SEPT 2018 TO MAR 2020): Indicators of Success – Progress has been made in all areas.

For Children:	For Parents:	For Teachers:
↑ Oral language skills	↑ School engagement	↑ Confidence in ability to help each child succeed.
↑ Literacy (reading) skills	↑ Confidence in ability to help their child progress	↑ Time to connect with parents about their child's progress.
↑ Numeracy skills	↓ Student absenteeism	↓ Behavioural incidents.
↑ Positive behaviours		↑ One-on-one time with students.
↑ Social Skills		

KEY FINDINGS

WITH RESPECT TO CHILDREN:

Social-emotional skills

- There were substantial improvements in all classes.
- Impressive gains in children's confidence and readiness to learn.
- Behaviour incidents were substantially reduced.



THE IMPACT, DESCRIBED BY STUDENTS:

In one school, Grade 2 classes were asked what they thought about their small class size. They said they loved their class because their teacher had more time for them, the classroom was quiet and they could concentrate on their school work; they felt safe trying new things because everyone helped one another.



ACADEMIC SKILLS

Oral language – vocabulary, grammar, sentences

Early in the project, it was confirmed, through specialized testing, that the children’s oral language skills (the backbone to early literacy success) were substantially below average and that this new area of focus was a must for the teachers. A speech language pathologist was added to the project team to coach the teachers and parents in applying best techniques to accelerate the children’s oral language development.

The children were tested again after one year to benchmark their progress. The strongest improvements were seen in the Gr 1 → Gr 2 cohort with an impressive 29% increase in students with age-appropriate vocabulary scores and a 13% increase in students with age-appropriate grammar. This intervention has reversed the trend for students who enter school with limited vocabularies and who increasingly fall further behind as they move through the grades.

Oral Language (vocabulary and grammar)
Test Results, 12-month progress

COHORT	Within or above average Vocabulary 2018	Within or above average Vocabulary 2019	Within or above average Grammar 2018	Within or above average Grammar 2019
K → Gr 1 cohort	61% (K)	69% (Grade 1)	65% (K)	63% (Grade 1)
Gr 1 → Gr 2 cohort	39% (Grade 1)	68% (Grade 2)	48% (Grade 1)	61% (Grade 2)



THE IMPACT, DESCRIBED BY A PRINCIPAL:

Having dedicated access to a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) brings the topic of Oral Language and Language development/speaking/listening to an entirely different level. We are now able to dig into the components of speaking and listening and Oral language in a way that impacts daily teaching and in a short time has not only enhanced our tool belts around oral language but has also enhanced our delivery. We are now applying more and more ways to engage students through play and oral language development. Teachers are now aware of screeners, what they mean, how to use them to drive instruction and how to provide opportunities to foster oral language development.



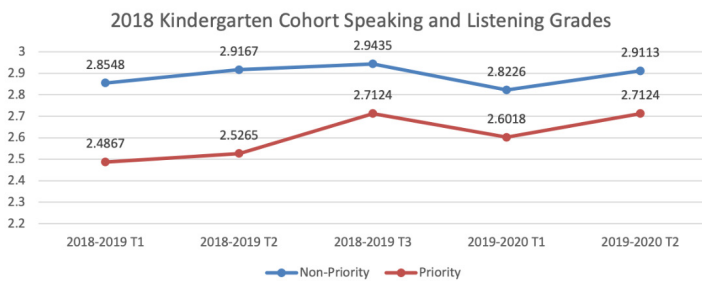
Literacy and numeracy

Research shows that without intervention, the literacy and numeracy gap for children who live in poverty normally increases with each progressive grade. This project demonstrated:

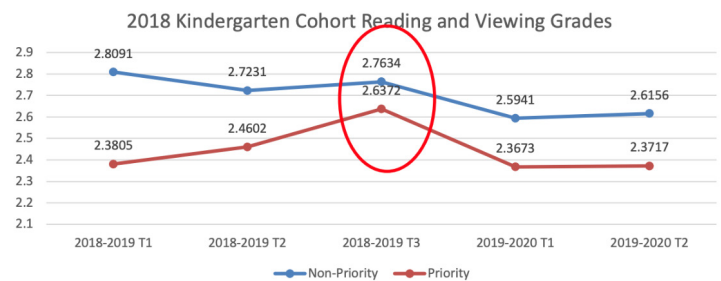
- The achievement gap closed for the Kindergarten students, when compared to the School District average.
- Although Grade 1 and 2 students did not achieve the school district average, the teachers reported rapid growth in their progress, compared to the average progress expected in their grade, and that given more time the gap would close.

In the graphs, below, the project's students are the red line. The blue line are School District averages.

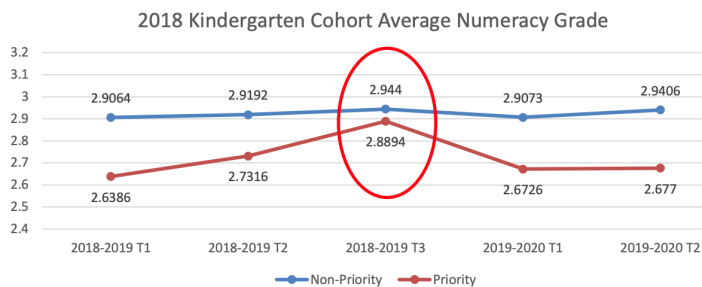
Kindergarten → Grade 1 cohort



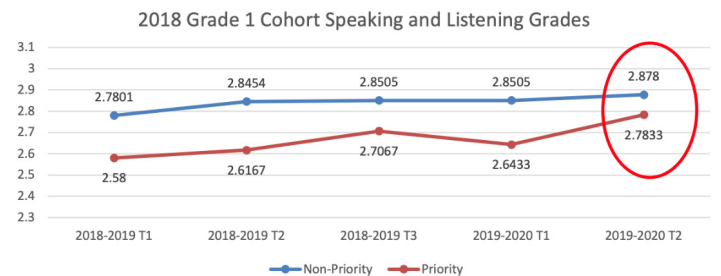
Kindergarten → Grade 1 cohort



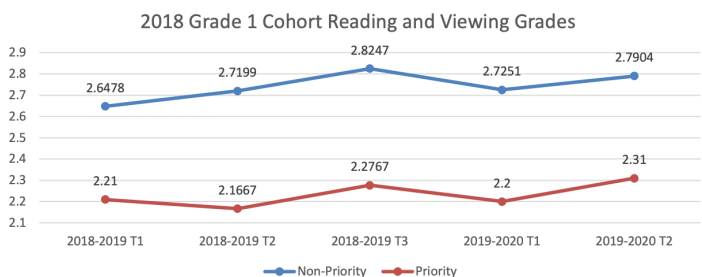
Kindergarten → Grade 1 cohort



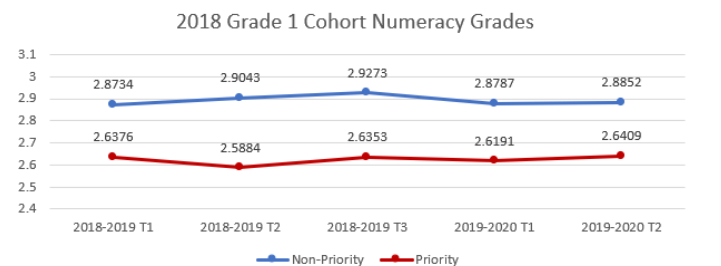
Grade 1 → Grade 2 cohort



Grade 1 → Grade 2 cohort



Grade 1 → Grade 2 cohort



When children succeed: an evaluation of one and a half years of strategic intervention to close the achievement gap

Derek J. Gaudet, M.A.
The University of New Brunswick Saint John

With respect to parents:

- Teacher-parent communication and rapport substantially increased.
- Parent participation in classroom and school events substantially increased.
- Parent satisfaction with their school was very high.
- Chronic absenteeism of students was significantly reduced:

Year One of the project revealed a troubling number of students who were **chronically absent from school** (10% or more days missed) and that these students showed significantly lower academic performance. Changing this picture became a priority. The schools worked hard to strengthen their relationships with parents. In Year Two, the rate of chronic absenteeism dropped from 25% to 14.9%. The school district average was 9%.

With respect to teachers:

The principals and teachers – being given the reins and resources to lead this project – put ‘personalized learning’ into practice in the classroom. They reported significant, multi-dimensional positive impacts on the children. Because it is challenging to quantify the many ways the children, the families and teachers progressed through this project, the schools prepared written reports to help us understand. Overall:

- There was significant improvement in teacher confidence in their ability to help their students succeed.
- Teachers attributed the small class size to achieving much better results for the children. Their ability to have quality time, daily, with each child enabled them to personalize each child’s learning, rapidly assess their progress and adjust quickly, have meaningful one-on-one conversations to improve oral language skills (and all skills). They also had time to build a more meaningful relationship with each parent.
- Teachers stated the small classes sizes produced a calm and safe environment for the children. Serious negative behaviours that cause class disruptions were just about eliminated, and student confidence and attentiveness to learning significantly increased.
- There was a notable increase in the professional development of all staff, team meetings and peer coaching which the staff particularly valued. Teachers found the collection and sharing of data to collaboratively inform personalized instruction and establish best practices in their schools very useful.
- All principals stated that this project was truly powerful. They were grateful for the opportunity to lead change, and believed that in time it would produce significant improvements for the students, the families, the staff and school system.



With respect to project evaluation:

Results from Year One of the Project created many new questions for the project team that couldn’t be answered without a deeper dive into the data. We decided to seek out a partner who could help us build a data platform that could help us better understand the children’s progress based on their varying life circumstances and learning barriers and classroom experiences. A new partnership with UNB Saint John was established to build a more sophisticated data platform to help us deepen the learning and more confidently drive the project’s findings and progress through stronger analysis.

FINAL PROJECT RESULTS

We have summarized the results above, but the full evaluation documents can be accessed by clicking the following links:

APPENDIX A: When Children Succeed
Final Project Report. Cindy Hatt

APPENDIX B: UNB Data Collection Report

HIGHLIGHTS – PROJECT LEARNINGS

Distinct from the project findings, we learned a wide variety of things along the way that are critical concepts and strategies for children’s education success:

Culture change

- Poverty and its impact on children’s educational achievement and attainment, must be part of the conversation throughout the education system, among government departments and in communities.
- Closing the education achievement gap needs to be a primary strategy used in improving the education system’s performance overall and reducing poverty in communities.
- Other government departments have an important role to play in integrating their services to help communities, schools and families ensure every child’s education success.

Early Childhood Education

- Research clearly shows that the younger an intervention is made, the more benefit the child receives, and the higher the return on investment. Reducing the achievement gap before these children arrive in kindergarten is critical.

Increased Autonomy and Transparency

- Increased transparency and more local discretion for how education funds will be used to ensure every child’s education success, should be instilled at the Department, Districts and school levels, and amongst project participants.

Data

- Harmonized and detailed testing and data collection processes must be established, in partnership with educators. The right evaluation tools and training are necessary to ensure data accuracy, consistency and interpretation.
- Data collection structures should allow for not only reporting individual student progress, but the ability to analyze and report demographic and cohort progress, classroom and teacher progress, absolute achievement compared to benchmarked measures, and more.

Boundaries management

- Achieving best value from ‘education innovation’ requires significant investment in research, demonstration projects, education evaluation methodologies and the tools to measure impact. The education system at every level must help to protect and monitor innovation projects in order to scale up success.



Absenteeism prevention and transience management

- Detailed tracking, issue management, and intervention plans must be put into place to prevent absenteeism and manage transience throughout the system – but particularly so in high poverty schools.

Education Excellence

- Professional development plays a major role in strengthening teachers’ abilities and confidence. Staff also require a clear and harmonized pedagogical approach to all facets of K-2 curriculum and measurement to reduce teacher-to-teacher standards variation. They would also benefit from the ability to collaborate on best practices development and co-planning classroom time accordingly.

Diagnosis and Intervention with wrap-around services

- Teachers must understand each child’s learning needs, and have timely access to professional diagnostic testing of students from a variety of perspectives.
- We must establish a coordinated ‘family-centred’ wrap-around approach that drives best interventions using a variety of professionals and organizations.

Digital

- Among our project schools, 40% of the children do not have an Internet connection or a learning appropriate device at home. This must be remedied.

Infrastructure

- Schools in high-poverty areas should be recognized as critical community assets, and flagged for early or priority replacement based on age, deferred maintenance, and other criteria so they can be replaced with schools designed to be community hubs.

Community & project management

- When Children Succeed-style program management teams, like the Living SJ Collective Impact Education Team, should be established with representation and leadership from all project stakeholders.

COVID-19 IMPACT

When our schools shut down in March 2020, our project – with respect to our current cohort of students – came to a premature end. However, to help the children continue their studies, the teachers tried to stay in regular contact with their students and project partners helped to ensure the children received the “at home” school supplies they needed.

YEAR THREE OF THE PROJECT (2021-2022 school year)

Notwithstanding the compounded effect of the “lockdown slide” and “summer slide” on our students’ abilities, when elementary schools re-opened in September 2020, they did so with a province-wide class size reduction strategy for K-2 students which effectively maintained the low teacher-to-student ratio in the classroom and removed the need for our project’s centrepiece strategy (small teacher-student ratio) and thus our ability to effectively evaluate the project’s original intentions (which focused on giving our students more resources than other schools to close the gap). Nevertheless, the teachers were able to continue to build their skills personalizing each child’s education experience.

While our school system rallied to adjust to the new normal, our project team agreed to pause the project until a clear path forward was established and to focus on the following activities:



- 1 Rapidly assessing each child’s academic and social-emotional status at the beginning of the school year to help each teacher understand the learning loss for each of their students and reset their individualized teaching plans to help the children catch up and go forward.
- 2 Documenting our final project results, with the help of Dr. Cindy Hatt and the research team at UNB.
- 3 Summarizing our project learnings – a critical set of concepts, separate from the project’s quantitative data points, that would guide both a project restart, and any recommendations to government to improve education practices that close the gap for children.
- 4 Meeting with government leaders to report the project’s findings, discuss next steps, and help move the policy discussion forward.
- 5 Making a comprehensive recommendation that this project continue to be supported for an additional three years, based on the promising results and the significant learnings from the initial 1.5 years of the project, and recognizing that COVID-19 had intensified the pressing need for disadvantaged children to receive intensive help to get back on track. Enabling the project to continue will also produce more definitive findings to guide public policy and practice.
- 6 Preparing a proposal for government for the next 3 years of this project.



NEXT STEP

Conversations with Government

This year the project partners have been meeting with government leaders to share the project findings and learnings and recommend that the project's development continue to be supported for the next 3 years to produce more definitive evidence to guide public policy and practice. The one and a half years the project had been able to operate, before COVID-19 hit, showed promising results but a 3-year span is required to build the students' foundational skills and close their achievement gap and establish best teaching practices.



THE ASK: IMMEDIATE NEXT STEP

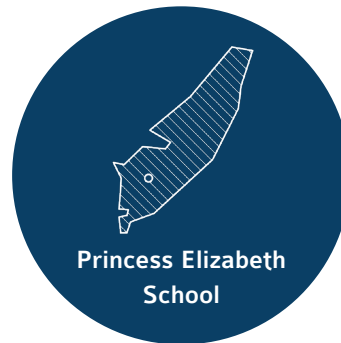
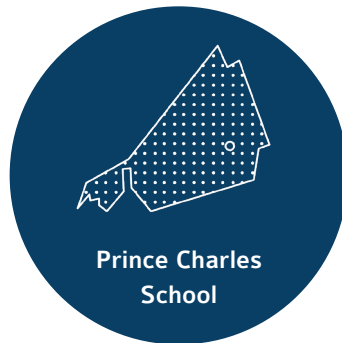
As you know, this year's funding for the *When Children Succeed* project remains unspent. We will deploy that funding to best effect, in discussion with our investors, pending the results of this meeting and the project landscape going forward.

	TIMING	SCOPE	ACTION	
NOW	Sept 2021 to June 2024	7 priority neighbourhood schools in SJ	Commit to fully funding the enrichments in place in our 7 priority neighbourhood schools so our project can continue for another three-year term, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. class size reduction (CSR) 2. Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) 3. Community School Coordinators in each school 4. Intensive language supports for newcomers. 	NOW

ADDITIONAL READING

Neighbourhood Profiles

The Human Development Council has developed neighbourhood profiles for each of our priority neighbourhoods, which provide powerful demographic and statistical information. We have linked the thumbnails below to the PDF documents, so you just have to click on them to access each profile.



PROJECT TEAM

The Funding Partners:

New Brunswick Dept.
of Education & Early
Childhood Development
+ Anglophone School
District South

\$1.5 M



Living SJ (Social
Innovation Fund, NB
Government)

\$1.5 M



Business Community
Anti-Poverty Initiative
(BCAPI) fundraising
campaign, launched
September 2018

\$1.5 M



THANK YOU TO BCAPI'S PROJECT INVESTORS!

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The Windsor Foundation

Please note, this is a partial list – some donors have chosen to remain anonymous.



**WE WELCOME YOUR
QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK.**

Thank you for being part of this important
project. We will continue to update you!

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