

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC-STATUS STUDENTS IN GRADES K-2

WHEN CHILDREN SUCCEED
PROJECT REPORT 2023



BCAPI
IN SAINT JOHN

PROJECT PURPOSE

The When Children Succeed (WCS) project is designed to close the well-documented achievement gap that exists between low-socio-economic status students and their more fortunate peers – ensuring all students are achieving at grade level for both literacy and numeracy, by the time they enter grade 3.

This early correction will improve graduation rates for low socio-economic-status children, have a significant positive impact on future workforce participation, and reduce the overall financial, social and moral burden of generational poverty on our society.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Led by Anglophone South School District (ASD-S) and the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI), the When Children Succeed project provides K-2 students in seven elementary schools serving Saint John's low-income neighbourhoods with additional teachers and resources to help overcome learning barriers caused by poverty.

A control group was established, using students in a small group of elementary schools in ASD-S who are learning from the same curriculum, but don't have the same extra educators and resources the WCS students have. We have used their results over the past three years to isolate the benefit of the extra resources applied to WCS classrooms.

With strong results already in the books, and a deepening partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), When Children Succeed is providing a blueprint to improve education outcomes and end generational poverty province-wide.



| PROJECT STAGE | YEARS | DESCRIPTION |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| PILOT | 2001 - 2011 | <p>PARTNERS ASSISTING LOCAL SCHOOLS (PALS) PROJECT - PRINCE CHARLES SCHOOL (85% NEIGHBOURHOOD CHILD POVERTY RATE)</p> <p>Between 2001 and 2011, three teachers were added to the school staff at Prince Charles School, to help improve education outcomes.</p> <p>Between 2006 and 2011, grade 7 standardized tests improved by 106% in writing and 121% in reading.</p> <p>Between 2011 and 2017, the high school graduation rate for neighbourhood students rose from 41% to 75%.</p> |
| EXPERIMENT | 2018 - 2022 | <p>WHEN CHILDREN SUCCEED (BCAPI, ASD-S, LIVING SJ) PROJECT - 7 SAINT JOHN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS</p> <p>Between 2018 and 2022, 21 teachers and one Speech Language Pathologist were added to the K-2 school staff across seven elementary schools in Saint John's most vulnerable neighbourhoods (with child poverty rates ranging from 32% to 94%).</p> <p>Achievement data showed students in these neighbourhoods lagged behind their peers in other schools by 15%. By June 2022, students in K-2 project classrooms were exceeding the literacy performance of their peers in a control group, even though they started the year significantly behind these students.</p> |
| PARTNERSHIP | 2022 - 2024 | <p>WHEN CHILDREN SUCCEED (BCAPI, ASD-S, EECD, PETL) PROJECT</p> <p>In June 2022, the provincial government agreed to take over funding the project for two additional years to conduct further study, inform education practices, and test the rollout of a new literacy curriculum and measurement framework. PETL became the lead funder for the project.</p> <p>By June 2023, WCS learners were outperforming a control group at all grade levels for literacy.</p> <p>In numeracy, WCS learners trailed a control group at end of year. However, in all three grades their percentage growth exceeded the control group learners.</p> <p>Active involvement from EECD and ASD-S in this phase of the project has resulted in early opportunities to use new curriculum, and test new assessment tools. These opportunities have resulted in a new, iterative model for the project.</p> <p>The project is becoming a test-bed for EECD initiatives, providing critical support for decision-making at the Provincial level. Other Districts are interested in what we are doing.</p> |
| OWNERSHIP | 2024 - | <p>The 2024 Provincial budget will need to include sustainable funding for this project, and a commitment to incorporate poverty (low socio-economic-status) funding into the EECD's overall inclusion strategy.</p> <p>We look forward to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable funding for Saint John's 7 WCS schools. • Province-wide funding for elementary schools operating in neighbourhoods with the highest child poverty rates. |





PROJECT CONTEXT

Poverty creates numerous barriers for children that can affect them for life. In the City of Saint John, one in four children live in poverty. That said, poverty is not evenly distributed. In some neighbourhoods, child poverty rates are very high and generational poverty has taken hold. The schools that serve these neighbourhoods, in pockets of poverty around the province, need more help to ensure their students succeed.

RESEARCH SHOWS:

- A significant percentage of low socio-economic-status children enter kindergarten 1-2 years behind, cannot read proficiently by grade 4, and enter grade 12 four years behind their peers.
- Any child not reading at grade level by the end of grade 3 is six times less likely to graduate.
- High school dropouts are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed.
- Poverty costs the province of New Brunswick \$1.4 billion/year.
- 23% of currently employed workers in NB are likely to retire in the next 10 years, and demographics indicate we will have approximately half as many people as we need to replace them.

High-performing education systems strive for every child's educational success and invest in closing the achievement gap for children who need more help. This is best done in the early years of education, setting children up for success in their most formative years. The results produce lifetime benefits for the children and an impressive return on investment.



KEY PROJECT STRATEGIES

1. Provide K-2 students with intensive individualized supports to acquire basic skills and a strong foundation leading to progressive education success.
2. Equip schools with additional educators and professional resources to help the students catch up to their peer group and meet education benchmarks by Grade 3.
3. Strengthen the students' social skills and academic skills, particularly oral language, literacy, and numeracy.
4. Engage parents, build trust, and involve them in their child's education success.
5. Apply best teaching practices and evaluation methods (quantitative and qualitative).
6. Help staff work as a team to continuously learn from the project (and one another) and improve student outcomes.
7. Work with school administrators and families to reduce levels of chronic absenteeism.

NEW THIS YEAR

This year's project included two new assessment tools developed to benchmark progress in literacy. New evaluation tools improve the sophistication, accuracy and usability of the data collected, but make it difficult to compare the students' progress from year to year. Caution should be used when comparing 2022/23 data to previous years.

KEY FINDINGS 2022/23

LITERACY

- Gap is closed.
- WCS students are exceeding the grade-level equivalence targets.
- There is more work to be done for both WCS students and control group students to achieve June targets.

NUMERACY

- Gap is not closed.
- Dramatic WCS student catchup over the course of the year.
- WCS students met or exceeded June targets.

ATTENDANCE

- Gap reduction target achieved.
- This metric will need continuous monitoring.

RESULTS

LITERACY

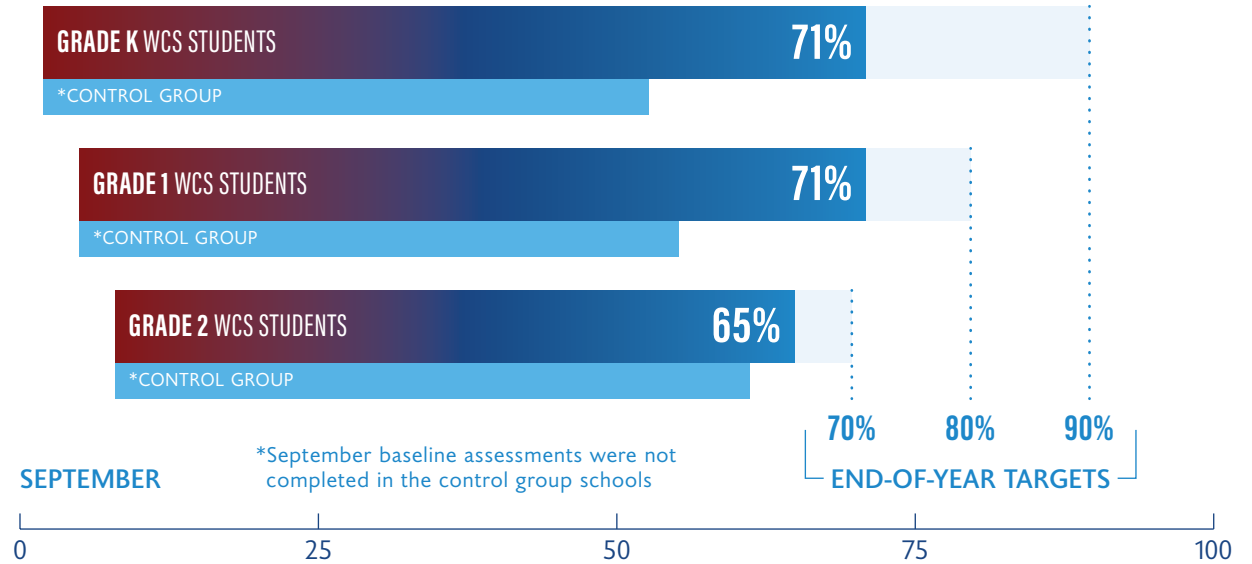
Since 2018, students in WCS classrooms have made impressive progress, and although some work remains for the entire student population to reach district targets, **we are pleased to report WCS students have closed the gap.**

Since 2021/22, When Children Succeed has been tracking achievements in literacy using two pillars of the Building Blocks of Reading: phonological awareness and phonics.

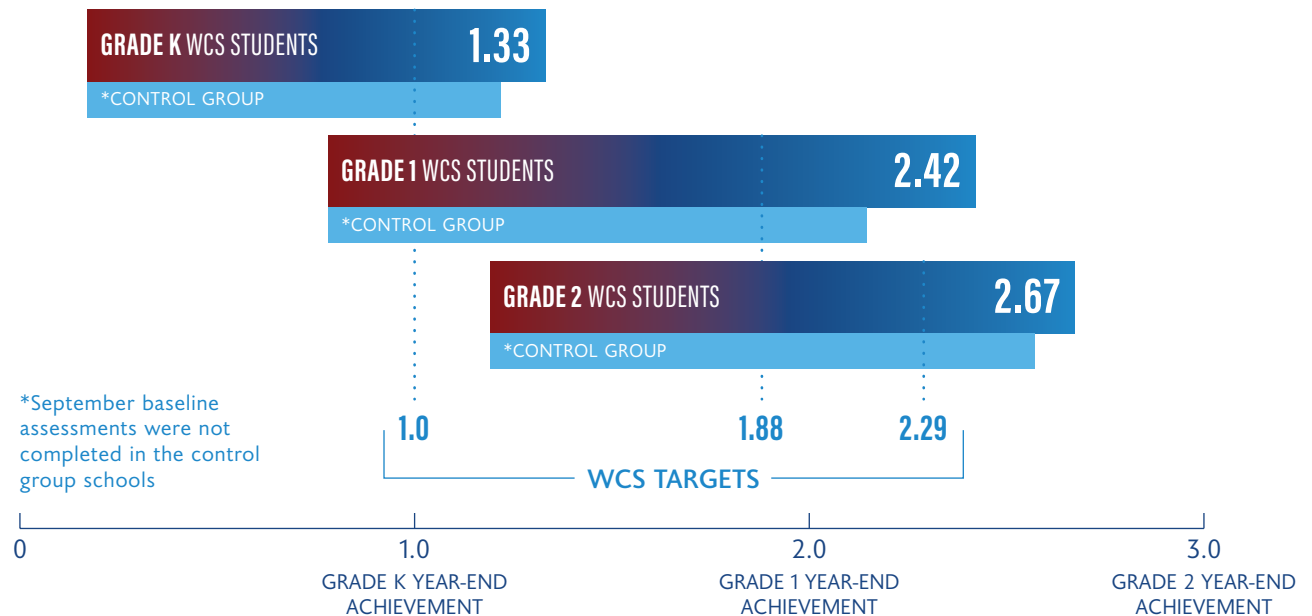
Phonological Awareness, the first of five pillars in the new literacy curriculum, achieved strong results in 2022/23, meeting or exceeding the achievements of the control group students. The first table to the right demonstrates the percentage of students working at year-end achievement level at the beginning of the year, and at year end.

The second table to the right demonstrates the grade-level equivalency of the students at the beginning of their year, and at the end. In all cases we can see the students gained mastery of more than one years' curriculum during the course the year.

LITERACY STEP 1: PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS - % of students working at year-end achievement level



LITERACY STEP 1: PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS - Grade level equivalent



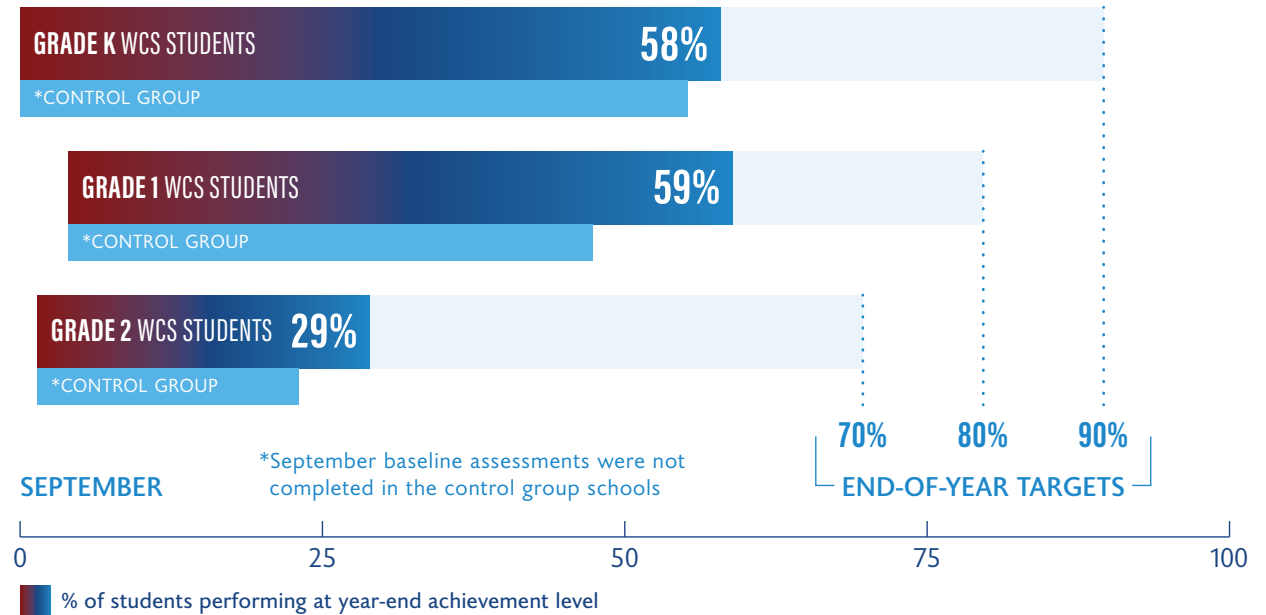
Phonics is the second pillar in the new literacy curriculum. It takes the conversational skills built in Phonological Awareness and begins the process of adapting these skills to reading and writing – it is a major leap in sophistication.

The first table to the right demonstrates the percentage of students working at year-end achievement level at the beginning of the year, and at year end.

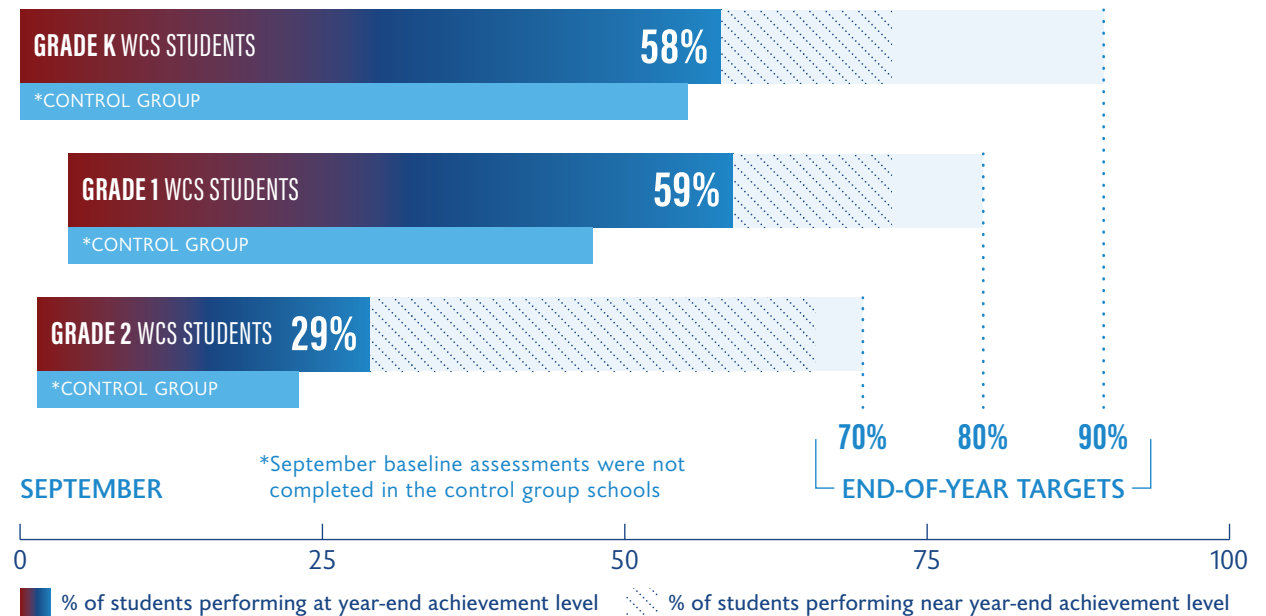
Since work remains to be done to hit targets for Phonological Awareness, we are not surprised to see our students fall well short of targets for Phonics. That said, we took the opportunity to take a deeper dive into the student achievement numbers.

The second table to the right shows the percentage of students working at year-end achievement level, and the number of students working at near year-end achievement level. With this view, we see a large boost in our grade two achievement.

LITERACY STEP 2: PHONICS - % of students working at year-end achievement level



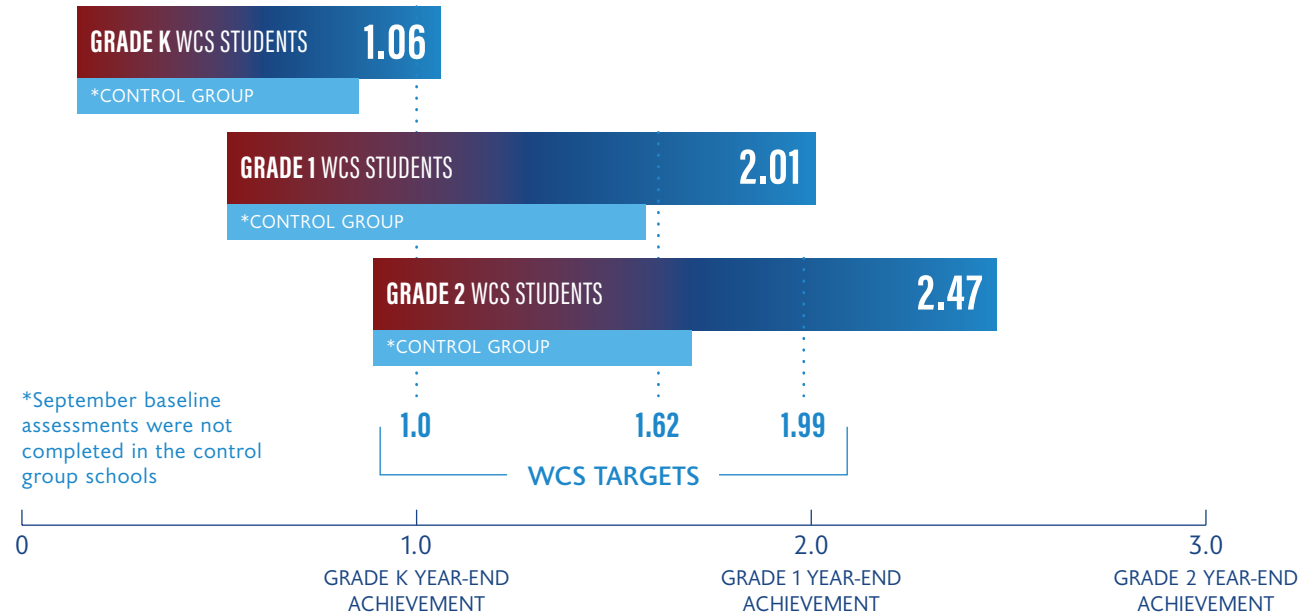
LITERACY STEP 2: PHONICS - % of students working at year-end achievement level



The table to the right demonstrates the grade-level equivalency of the students at the beginning of their year, and at the end.

WCS students continued to exceed the achievements of our control group students on this measure.

LITERACY STEP 2: PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS - Grade level equivalent



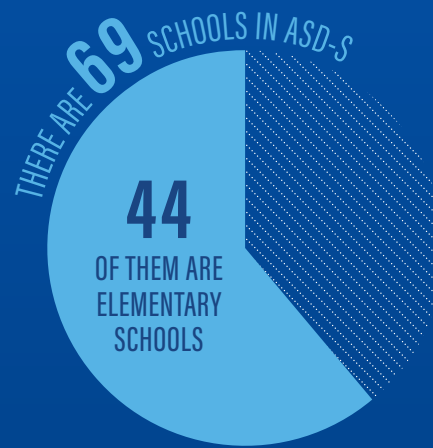
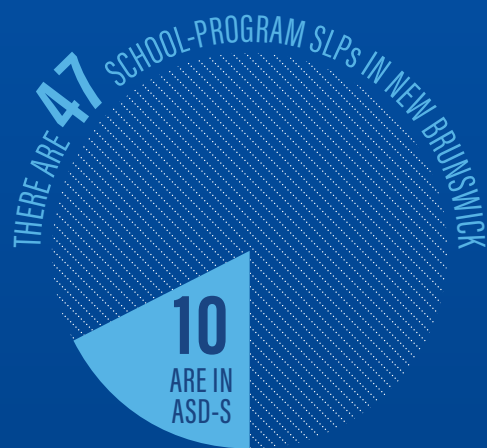
“WCS learners outperformed the control group at all grade levels. Phonological awareness data for K, 1 and 2 all exceed grade level equivalence targets. Simply put, wcs learners who are continuing with the project will start next school year ready to receive grade-level content.”

Nicole MacNeill
Curriculum Coordinator for Numeracy and Literacy Projects, ASD-South, NB

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows low-SES children can have a vocabulary less than half the size of the vocabularies of high-SES children. This is why low-SES children start school 1-2 years behind their peers.

- Before a child learns to read, all their learning is done orally – by listening to words and by having conversations. This means vocabulary development is the key to all early learning.
- New Brunswick's Kindergarten curriculum is designed to start literacy and numeracy education based on a foundation of oral language. If that foundation isn't there, that's a big problem.
- The design of oral language interventions to help low-SES children catch up is done by School Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs).



MEET ERIN

The WCS project has always provided funds for a SLP dedicated to our seven schools.

Erin Court joined the project in the 2021/2022 school year. She is a tier-1 SLP, meaning she develops and implements proactive and preventative interventions for all students, and provides high-value support for educators.

According to Erin, it is the kindergarten students who need the most intensive support, and early intervention is key. The activities she develops enhance oral language skills including vocabulary and concept knowledge. These include barrier games, semantic gradient activities, and interactive reading time. Often, these are group activities, giving students a chance to have conversations with their peers, to work collaboratively, and think critically.

Erin visits each WCS classroom once a month, modelling strategies for educators to advance vocabulary and oral language skills, and attends team meetings to provide insight and best-practices advice outside of the classroom setting.

She says the impact on teachers and students is clear, and she feels she is making a difference. A grade 2 classroom at Princess Elizabeth School requested that she send a digital copy of an activity so they could take it home and play with their parents.

“ It’s nice to hear that students are talking about it— it really goes to show the impact that these experiences can have on students. It promotes a love for education and literacy that will open so many doors.”

Erin Court
Tier-1 SLP – WCS Project

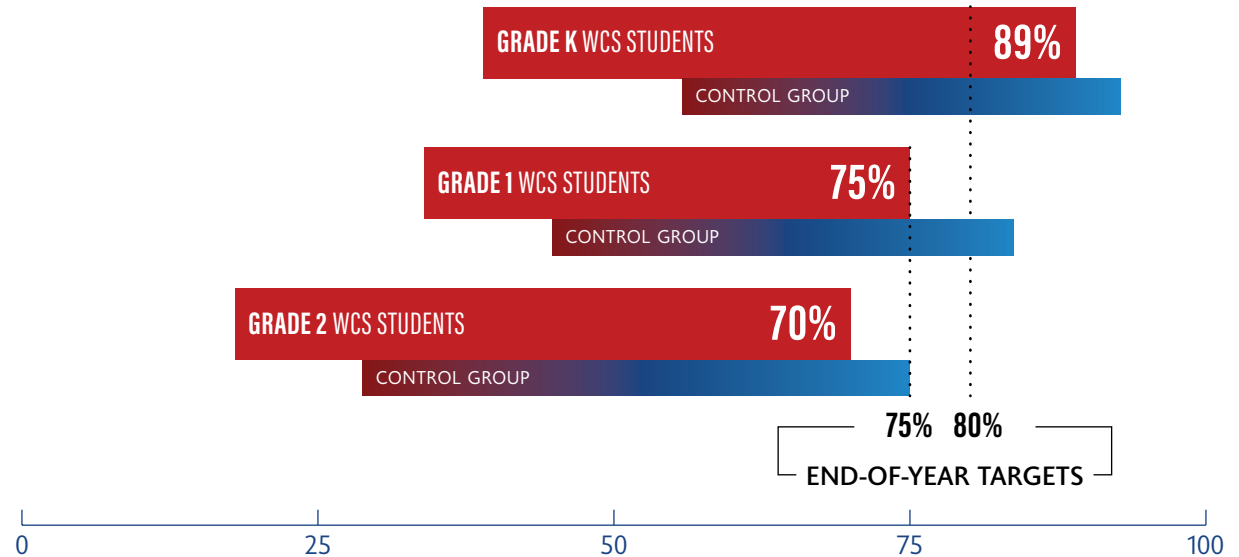
NUMERACY

Our numeracy curriculum is a series of learn-from-scratch concepts that are reviewed at year-end. **Work remains to be done to close the gap:** WCS students lagged the control group in all grades.

However, because September numeracy baseline assessments were completed for both WCS students and the control group, we were able to see very encouraging “catch up” growth for WCS students in the 2022/23 school year.

In all cases, WCS students began the year well behind their peers in the control group, and in all cases, they narrowed that gap. In Kindergarten in particular, the initial gap was very large AND was almost closed by year-end.

NUMERACY: % of students working at year-end achievement level



“What is... exciting about these results is that the percentage of growth in the WCS schools exceeded the percentage of growth at all grade levels in the control group.”

Nicole MacNeill
Curriculum Coordinator for Numeracy and Literacy Projects, ASD-South, NB

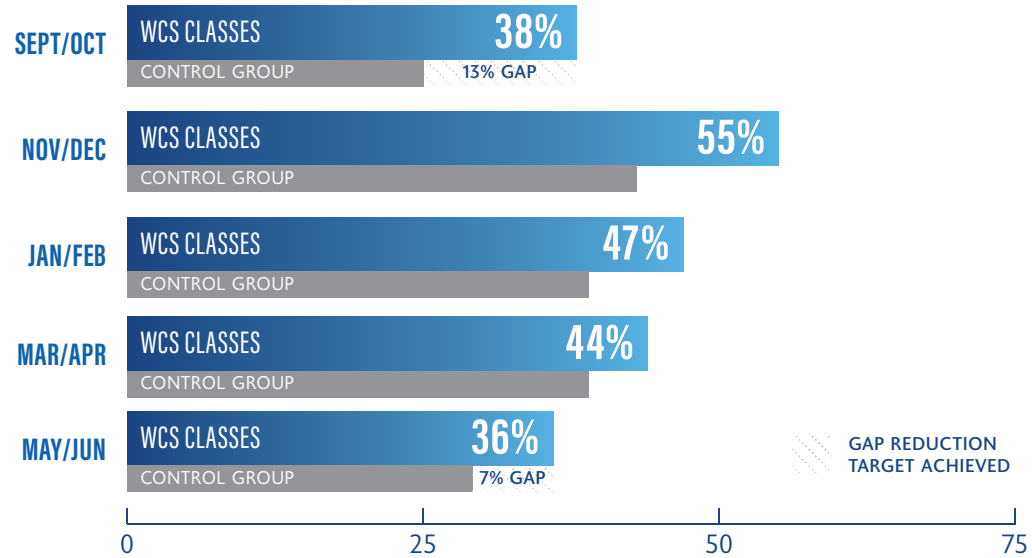
ABSENTEEISM

Post-COVID, with strict rules on staying home if you feel at all sick, the number of students missing more than 10% of school days per month, defined as Chronic Absenteeism, rose sharply.

In March, WCS school principals launched a family engagement strategy to reduce the gap between WCS students and Control Group students on this measure.

The goal for this year was to reduce the Chronic Absenteeism Rate gap – from 13% to 7%. **This goal was achieved.**

ATTENDANCE: % of chronically absent students (>10% of days per month)



OTHER KEY LEARNINGS

- WCS classrooms report an **increase in student engagement**, positive behaviours, social skills, confidence, and overall attitude.
- Project schools report that **parent engagement and satisfaction had increased**.
- **WCS teachers** universally report an increase in job satisfaction, and an increase in confidence in their ability to help these children succeed.
- The **importance of consistency** of teaching staff, as well as pedagogical approach is clearly evident.
- The critical importance of **accurate, consistent and strategically relevant data** that is easy to collect and evaluate in a classroom setting has been underscored throughout the project. With the support of ASD-S, we have made great strides on this front, and will continue to make improvements as we ask questions of the data moving forward.
- **Best practices sharing** has been a terrific benefit of the project, as project teachers and administrators meet to strategize and problem solve on a regular basis.
- The literacy data, year after year, (despite different measures being applied each year) **consistently** showed the students' literacy gap had closed.
- An average of 750 K-2 students benefited from the project, each year. The annual investment of **\$1.5 M** for the project translates to **\$2,000.00** per student. This project equips the children with the **essential education foundations** for success in life. The benefits for all are **priceless**.

“The social-emotional growth from the WCS project is huge. Many of our kids come in and don't fit in academically. They feel lost and overwhelmed. They have a negative impression of school from the beginning. But here they feel that they belong. Their confidence is growing thanks to the project and its extra supports. It shows everywhere - in their behaviour, their language... This project has been extremely invaluable to everyone involved.”

Kaberi Sen
Lead Co-Teacher for WCS (Hazen White St. Francis)





LOOKING FORWARD

June 2024 marks the end of the remaining funding for this project.

The results captured in this document clearly demonstrate the value of this intervention for these children.

Because of this program, WCS students are on an even footing with their more fortunate peers as they move through elementary school – giving them the opportunity to end the cycle of generational poverty.

We ask that Government:

1. create a permanent funding stream for our 7 project schools, and
2. expand the program to other elementary schools operating in high-poverty neighbourhoods throughout the province.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Ask number one: a \$1.5 million per year funding stream, which amounts to approximately \$215,000 annually, per school.

Ask number two: research shows that interventions like WCS have the biggest benefit in neighbourhoods with child poverty rates of 80%+, but significant benefits are also achieved for neighbourhoods with child poverty rates of 50%+.

Government could follow the same steps Saint John used to select schools for project participation:

- 1) Establish a population segment for the catchment area of each elementary school in New Brunswick.
- 2) Pull low-income tax status information from Stats Canada for these population segments.
- 3) Rank the elementary schools by highest to lowest child poverty rate.
- 4) Determine a budget allotment, and apply to the highest priority schools, working from highest to lowest child poverty rate.

A modest annual investment could:

- Significantly reduce the annual cost of poverty in New Brunswick (measured at \$1.4B per year).
- Significantly increase the downstream provincial workforce participation rate.

When Children Succeed truly demonstrates how Government, Business, and Community can work together to tackle big problems.

THANK YOU

Thank you to the N.B. Government for recognizing the value of this project and its potential to improve the lives of children who live in poverty.

Thank you to PETL, EECD, and the ASD-S School District for your investment in this initiative, and for your oversight and data management work.

Thank you to all our community investors for believing in this project. You saw the benefit of this kind of intervention and guidance, and we will continue to work toward seeing this model implemented permanently for these Saint John students, and for others like them throughout the province.

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Visit www.bcapi.ca for more information about this project, as well as access to reports and results.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A PART OF THIS IMPORTANT PROJECT.

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