This report was completed by Taylor Newberry Consulting Inc.
www.taylornewberry.ca

This report was commissioned by United Way Toronto, who are the major funder of Bridge to Success.

Bridge to Success is managed and delivered by Community Microskills Development Centre at North Albion Collegiate Institute.

This evaluation project benefitted greatly from the support of the staff at Microskills and NACI. We are also grateful for the analyses of school board data conducted by The Research and Information Services team at the Toronto District School Board.
Executive Summary

Overview
The Bridge to Success (B2S) pilot project was launched in September 2006. It was one of the Youth and Education initiatives undertaken by United Way Toronto to explore new approaches to improving the educational outcomes for at-risk youth. Initially, the program was intended to run for four years, but increased funding allowed the program to run for five years. The program was evaluated at two points: midway in 2009 and this final evaluation completed in 2011.

The goal of Bridge to Success is to build the capacity of students to overcome the academic and social challenges they face. In order to achieve measurable success, this goal was organized into five primary outcomes:

- Improve the educational outcomes of at-risk youth
- Increase students’ rate of graduation
- Increase enrolment in post-secondary education
- Increase opportunities for participants to develop life skills and personal competencies
- Increase opportunities for participants to contribute to their community

Program Partners
Bridge to Success was developed through a partnership between four stakeholders.

United Way Toronto (UWT) provided funding to Micro Skills to deliver B2S and managed the funding for the program. UWT advocated for the resources to continue the program for a fifth year (2010-2011).

Community MicroSkills Development Centre (MicroSkills) is a non-profit agency from the local community. It provides a variety of programs and services for youths, immigrants and visible minority persons. MicroSkills hired and supervised B2S program staff, managed volunteers, and advocated for donations and in-kind support for B2S.

Toronto District School Board (TDSB) especially Research and Information Services department (RIS). Secondary analyses of the TDSB data used in the evaluation of B2S were provided by RIS.

North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI) identified at-risk students and worked with B2S to involve these students in the program activities. NACI also provided workplace for B2S staff and classroom space for the programs. As the program developed and the students became more involved, the students had a great impact on the type of programming required.
Program Components
The program was designed to follow students in one grade cohort at North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI) in Toronto. NACI was chosen to participate in this project because its academic and social community was representative of a broad spectrum of challenges. The NACI student population includes many newcomers to Canada, as well as youth whose home lives are in transition, and students who are living in poverty.

The B2S program consisted of three main components:

1. **Academic support**
   *Homework Club:* The after-school Homework Club provided assistance to at-risk learners. Peer tutors and post-secondary student tutors offered assistance with homework. In addition, program staff provided informal support and problem-solving assistance to students dealing with academic challenges.

2. **Social Support**
   *Boys’ and Girls’ Club and Leadership & Mentorship Club* included leadership-based workshops on topics such as leadership styles, community engagement, diversity and equality.
   *Motivational and Life Skills Workshops* supported youth who demonstrated anti-social behavioral.

3. **Financial support**
   For each year that a student met the program’s participation requirements, up to $250 was held in trust for that student. Upon successful completion of high school, a student could use the bursary towards the cost of post-secondary education.

Secondary components included advocacy support, community supports and changing attitudes with the school.

Evaluation Purpose

- Measure the extent to which B2S achieved the five outcomes.
- Provide insights into the key program ingredients that have led to B2S’s success in achieving the five outcomes.
- Offer recommendations about how the program could be improved or adapted.
- Develop an up-to-date logic model of the program.

Evaluation Methods

- Analysis of secondary data from the Toronto District School Board’s Research and Information Services department
- Feedback from a stakeholder focus group. Participants included B2S students, B2S staff, NACI staff, Community MicroSkills Development Centre staff, and United Way Toronto staff
• Responses to an online survey completed by B2S students
• Feedback from a B2S student focus group
• Feedback from NACI teachers obtained via telephone interviews

Key Findings

• Students who participated in B2S were engaged in school.
• B2S students graduated at a rate similar to the TDSB average.
• B2S students were more likely to return for a fifth year to complete their studies.
• B2S students had post-secondary enrollment rates equal to the TDSB average.
• B2S students were more informed about the services available in their community and were better prepared to search for employment.
• B2S helped to present NACI students to the community in a positive light.

Elements of Success

The evaluation results suggest that there are four key factors to B2S’s success:

1. **Homework Club**
   Several aspects of the Homework Club made it particularly effective: location, convenience, reliability.

2. **Exceptional Staff**
   Feedback from all stakeholder groups supports the conclusion that B2S’s success can in large part be attributed to the qualities of B2S staff, which were highly-motivated and very engaged with the participants. The B2S staff was described as “passionate,” “relatable,” “a role model,” genuine,” and “consistent.” It is important to understand that the abilities of the frontline staff can strongly vary the results of this program.

3. **Integration in the school**
   Stakeholders agreed that offering B2S in the school was a key feature of the program’s success; it gave students fewer reasons for why they couldn’t attend. The program’s location in the school also removed barriers to participation such as finances (e.g., transportation costs associated with getting to of-site programming) and lack of motivation.

4. **Bursary**
   In response to an item in the online student survey about reasons for taking part in B2S, 89% of students indicated that receiving the money for college or university was “very important” (78%) or “somewhat important” (11%).

Recommendations

1. **Formalize and evaluate the role of food in the program**
   At the logic modeling session held in May 2011, “food” was identified as a key component of B2S model. Given that food has been identified as a core component of the program, it may be necessary to increase the resources allocated to it. The role of food in achieving outcomes should also be formally evaluated in the future.
2. **Explore the possibility of offering a career mentorship component**
   The possibility of adding a career mentorship component to the program should be explored. B2S staff and NACI teachers felt that more could have been done to help students explore alternatives other than post-secondary education: apprenticeship programs, skilled trades, co-operative work programs.

3. **Conduct regular recruitment and outreach efforts**
   Recruitment and outreach to students and school staff should be on-going throughout the program.

4. **Explore options for adding a formal parent involvement component to the program model**
   Research has shown that family involvement is one of the most important contributors to school success and completion. It is recommended that options for formalizing the role parents play in the program be explored.

**Conclusion**
Bridge to Success has been a successful pilot project. The five primary outcomes were included in the design of the project, and the evaluation reveals that there was improvement in each area. Bridge to Success is an effective program that positively impacts the students, the educators and the surrounding community.
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Introduction

Over the past several years, United Way Toronto (UWT) has worked to increase opportunities for youth through community investments, research and other special initiatives. A number of models exist for programs designed to improve the educational outcomes among at-risk secondary school students. The Bridge to Success (B2S) program is one of the Youth and Education initiatives implemented by UWT; students participated in a voluntary program that was created to improve the educational outcomes of at-risk youth.

The B2S program is a school/community partnership designed to assist youth who are deemed at-risk, academically and socially. The program serves youth who attend North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI), which is located in the Jamestown-Mount Olive neighbourhood of Toronto. United Way Toronto began piloting the B2S program in 2006 in partnership with Community MicroSkills Development Centre and NACI. As mentioned previously, participation was encouraged, but voluntary. Although the program was initially conceived as a targeted intervention that would support a small number of at-risk students, the model was adapted during the early planning stages so that all students at NACI who were in Grade Nine in 2006 could be supported.

The Bridge to Success program had five primary outcomes:

- Improve the educational outcomes of at-risk youth
- Increase students’ rate of graduation
- Increase enrolment in post-secondary education
- Increase opportunities for participants to develop life skills and personal competencies
- Increase opportunities for participants to contribute to the community.

Students at NACI often face barriers to academic success. Prior to the project beginning in 2006, NACI officials determined that:

- Twenty percent of students were at moderate risk, largely because they were newcomers with limited English language skills and a history of displacement and social isolation issues.
- Twenty-seven percent of students were at high risk because they faced multiple issues including special education, family issues, homelessness, hunger and poverty.

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The academic success rate of students at NACI reflects these challenges. For example, in 2007-2008, NACI was below the provincial average in terms of the number of students who achieved the provincial standard in academic math and applied math.²

The goal of B2S was to build the capacity of students to overcome these challenges. Based out of an office in the library at NACI, B2S staff offered a variety of programming to students in the target cohort. In addition to providing students with academic supports (e.g., group support for homework completion and one-on-one tutoring), B2S staff and peer volunteers acted as mentors and role models for students. Although they were employees of MicroSkills rather than the school board, B2S staff worked closely with NACI staff. The program was easily accessible because key activities took place in the school immediately following regular school hours. For example, the Homework Club met daily in the library and the Boys'/Girls' Club sessions took place in the Family Studies food lab.

In addition to serving the academic needs of at-risk youth, B2S also created opportunities for students to develop life skills and personal competencies. Leadership development workshops, for example, were designed to work towards crime prevention in the school and community. Through these workshops youth also had the opportunity to connect with outside agencies and resources in the community. Youth were encouraged to become positive role models in their school and community.

**Program Partners**

B2S was developed through a partnership between United Way Toronto, Community MicroSkills Development Centre, North Albion Collegiate Institute, and the Toronto District School Board.

Community MicroSkills Development Centre (“MicroSkills”) is a non-profit agency based in the same neighbourhood as NACI. It provides programs and services that assist women, youth, immigrants and visible minority persons to achieve their full potential. MicroSkills was responsible for hiring and supervising B2S program staff. It also arranged for other local service providers to visit NACI, obtained donations and in-kind support for B2S, and managed volunteers.

North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI)’s role in the program was to identify at-risk students (i.e., educationally and socially at-risk), and to work with B2S staff to involve these students in program activities. NACI also provided space for after-school activities (e.g., library space for the Homework Club, food lab space for the Girls'/Boys’ Club, and gym space for recreational activities), and provided workspace for program staff.

United Way Toronto (UWT) provided funding to MicroSkills to deliver B2S and managed the bursary component of the program. UWT also supported B2S by advocating for resources to continue the program for a fifth year in 2010-2011.

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² [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sift/schoolProfileSec.asp?SCH_NUMBER=929468&x=16&y=11#demo](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sift/schoolProfileSec.asp?SCH_NUMBER=929468&x=16&y=11#demo)
Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Research and Information Services (RIS) department was a generous supporter of B2S. Secondary analyses of TDSB data were provided by RIS staff to support the evaluation of B2S.

**Program Components**
The B2S program consisted of a number of core components.

1. **Academic support**
   *Homework Club & 1:1 Academic Support.* The after-school Homework Club provided group and one-on-one assistance to at-risk learners. Peer tutors and post-secondary student tutors offered assistance with homework. In addition, program staff provided informal support and problem-solving assistance to students dealing with academic challenges.

2. **Social support**
   *Boys’ Club and Girls’ Club, and Leadership & Mentorship Club.* The clubs organized workshops on topics such as leadership styles, community engagement, diversity and equality. Motivational and Life Skills Workshops supported youth who demonstrated anti-social behaviour. In addition to structured programming, B2S participants also received informal, one-to-one support from staff.

3. **Financial incentives**
   For each year that a student met the program requirements, up to $250 was held in trust for her/him (i.e., up to $1,000 accumulated over four years). Upon successful completion of high school, a student could use the bursary towards the cost of post-secondary education (e.g., tuition or books/supplies). Participating students also received TTC tickets.

4. **Advocacy support**
   One-to-one support was offered to help the students identify personal goals and implement personal action plans. For example, staff often helped students research and apply for scholarships.

5. **Community support**
   Program staff provided information about post-secondary education and job training programs to students. They brought other service providers into the school to provide information and support to students.

6. **“Raising the bar” or transforming school culture**
   Program staff worked closely with school staff and other key stakeholders to create a collaborative school atmosphere that encouraged stronger academic results and emphasized the importance of post-secondary education.
Evolution of the Program
Although B2S offered the basic activities described above over the five years of the pilot, the emphasis shifted over time. As the students moved into the senior years of secondary school (i.e., Grade 11 and 12), group programming (like the Boys’ Club and the Girls’ Club) became less central, and individual coaching around study skills and the transition out of secondary school became more important. Volunteers, and in particular post-secondary student tutors, became a more important element of the program over time.

As B2S became more established, MicroSkills began to connect participants more directly to other programs provided by partners in the community. By the fourth year of the program, B2S students had access to a wide range of services from community agencies. For example, B2S students and their families were being linked to MicroSkills’ summer recreation programs.
Evaluation Purpose and Research Design

In 2009, a mid-point evaluation of B2S was conducted by The Centre for Community Based Research. At that time, the key activities of the B2S program were being implemented as planned, and the program was on track toward achieving its five outcomes.

In 2009-2010, Ontario's high school graduation rate after four years was 72%, and the graduation rate after five years was 81%. Therefore, anticipating that many B2S students would require a fifth year at NACI in order to graduate, United Way Toronto was able to secure a fifth year of funding for the 2010-2011 school year.

**Table 1. B2S Program Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B2S Program Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>2007/2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>2008/2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>2009/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Additional year at NACI or first-year post-secondary education</td>
<td>2010/2011</td>
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</table>

The present report describes the summative evaluation of B2S that was conducted in 2010-2011, the fifth year of the program. The purposes of the summative evaluation are to:

- Measure the extent to which B2S achieved the five program objectives
- Provide insights into the key program ingredients that have led to B2S's success in helping students
- Identify and describe recommendations for improvement and adaptation
- Develop an up-to-date logic model of the program.

**Data Collection Tools**

The findings in this report are based on the analysis of five sources of quantitative and qualitative data; these sources reflect the perspectives of the project’s key stakeholder groups:

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Secondary analyses of school board data conducted by the Toronto District School Board’s Research and Information Services department

Responses to an online survey completed by B2S students & graduates

Feedback from a B2S student focus group

Feedback from NACI teachers obtained via telephone interviews

Feedback from a stakeholder focus group. Participants included B2S students, B2S staff, NACI staff, Community MicroSkills Development Centre staff, and United Way Toronto staff.

All data collection methods and procedures received the approval of the TDSB’s research ethics committee.

Secondary analyses conducted by the Toronto District School Board

Analyses that compared the performance of B2S participants with TDSB averages were conducted by the TDSB’s Research and Information Services (RIS) department. At the time of the summative evaluation, TDSB data were available up to the end of students’ fourth year of high school (i.e., 2009-2010 academic year). Therefore, the analyses conducted by RIS staff do not include the fifth year of the B2S program (i.e., 2010-2011 academic year). RIS staff compared the performance of B2S students to TDSB averages on the following dimensions:

- The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) is a compulsory standardized test for high school students in Ontario. Developed by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the OSSLT is based on the expectations for reading and writing that are outlined in the Ontario curriculum for all subject areas up to the end of Grade 9. The OSSLT is administered in Grade 10.
- In addition to information about the percentage of students who graduated at the end of their fourth year of high school, RIS staff also provided details about what happened to students who did not graduate, including whether they stayed in the TDSB system, transferred out of TDSB to another school system, or dropped out.
- The rates of enrollment in college and university in Ontario were provided.
- Students’ rates of absenteeism in Grade 10 were provided. High absenteeism is defined by the TDSB as more than 10% absenteeism (i.e., more than half a day of school missed per week). High absenteeism in Grade 10 is considered an indicator of high risk for non-graduation.
- Information about the number of credits accumulated by the end of Grade 10 was provided. Accumulation of fewer than 14 credits by the end of Grade 10 is considered an indicator of high risk for non-graduation.

The process of identifying the sub-set of B2S participants within the TDSB data was complicated. RIS staff found that the cohort could not be reliably identified using data from the Grade 9 year (2006-2007). In 2006-2007, there was considerable fluctuation in the cohort (i.e., students moving into and out of the cohort). RIS staff therefore used two criteria based on the students’ Grade 10 year (2007-2008) to identify B2S participants:

- Was a student eligible to write the OSSLT? Eligibility for the OSSLT is considered a clear indicator that a student is in Grade 10.
- Did a student receive the bursary for participation in B2S in the 2007-2008 academic
year (i.e., in their Grade 10 year)? B2S staff tracked the identification numbers of students who participated, and this information was provided to TDSB.

All students in the grade cohort were eligible to participate in B2S. If a student met the first criteria, she/he was considered to be a Grade 10 student and, therefore, eligible for the program. In 2007-2008, 114 students were identified using this method.

If a student met both criteria, then he or she was deemed a B2S participant. An additional 144 such students were identified.

In total, 258 students were eligible to participate in B2S in 2007-2008; the research concluded that 56% of the eligible students took part in the program.

**Online Student Survey**
An online survey of current B2S participants (i.e., Year Five students) and former B2S participants (i.e., students who completed high school after four years) was conducted in November 2010 (See Appendix A for a copy of the student survey). The survey focused on students’ perceptions of the various B2S program activities, their motivations for participating in B2S, and ways the students felt the program helped them. The online survey was completed by 50 participants (25 current students and 25 graduates): a 35% response rate.

B2S survey participants were a diverse group:

- Fifty-four percent of respondents were male, 40% were female, and 6% of respondents did not report their sex.
- Nearly half of the students (48%) were born outside of Canada. Other countries of birth were: India (22%), Pakistan (6%), Jamaica (4%), and Nigeria (4%). Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Sri Lanka and the United States were also indicated.
- Nearly half of the sample (48%) reported that English was not the language most frequently spoken at home.

![Figure 1. Survey Respondents' Country of Birth](image)

- **Canada**
- **India**
- **Pakistan**
- **Jamaica**
- **Nigeria**
- **Not Specified**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Student Focus Group**

Twelve B2S students in their fifth year of high school (8 males, 4 females) took part in a focus group that was conducted in June 2011 (i.e., at the end of B2S Year Five). Participants were invited to attend the focus group by B2S staff. The purpose of the focus group was to complement and deepen the findings from the online survey. See Appendix B for a copy the focus group questionnaire.

**Telephone Interviews with NACI teachers**

Six NACI teachers were invited to participate in a telephone interview, and four teachers agreed to be interviewed. Teachers’ names were put forward by NACI’s principal and B2S staff, and were chosen to represent different levels of familiarity with B2S and different subjects areas taught at NACI. The teachers interviewed had been at NACI for between four and 14 years. See Appendix C for a copy of the interview protocol.

**Stakeholder Logic Model Session**

In May 2011, a half-day session was held with key project stakeholders. The purpose of this session was to review and revise the Bridge to Success program logic model. Eleven participants representing the following stakeholder groups took part:

- MicroSkills staff (2)
- Bridge to Success staff (3)
- NACI staff (1)
- United Way Toronto staff (1)
- B2S student participants (4)

Staff from the TDSB’s Research and Information Services department were also invited to participate, but were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts.

**Table 2: Evaluation Data Collection Tools**

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<tr>
<th>Data Collection Tool</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online student survey</td>
<td>B2S staff invited all current (i.e., Year Five students) to participate. The survey (see Appendix A) was also distributed to a number of B2S graduates for whom staff had contact information.</td>
<td>n=50 B2S students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student focus group</td>
<td>At the end of Year Five, B2S students were invited to participate in a focus group session held at NACI (see Appendix B)</td>
<td>n=12 B2S students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher telephone interviews</td>
<td>Purposeful sampling was used to conduct telephone interviews with NACI teachers (see Appendix C)</td>
<td>n=4 teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary analyses of TDSB Data</td>
<td>Comparisons of B2S students with TDSB averages on key performance indicators (e.g., graduation rate, attendance, performance on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, etc.)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder model building session</td>
<td>Participants representing B2S stakeholder groups were invited to a half-day session to discuss the B2S program logic model. Stakeholder groups included: B2S students, B2S Staff, NACI staff, MicroSkills staff, and United Way Toronto staff.</td>
<td>n=11 stakeholders</td>
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Data Analysis
Qualitative data were analyzed using content coding, with the main research questions providing a framework for analysis. Detailed notes, including quotations from each interview and focus group were coded according to themes that emerged from the data. Anonymous quotations of students, program staff and teachers were used wherever possible in order to retain the words of the evaluation participants. Quantitative data from the online student survey were analyzed descriptively (i.e., item response frequencies) using SPSS (a computer program for statistical analysis).
Who did B2S Serve?

According to data compiled by TDSB, 44% of the students who were eligible to participate in B2S chose not to. Furthermore, TDSB demographic data suggested that some groups of students were more likely to take part in B2S than others:

- Sixty-five percent of the students who were eligible for B2S but did not take part were male.
- Canadian-born students had a 60% participation rate in the program, whereas South-Asian born students had a 47% participation rate.
- Students whose mother tongue is English had a 69% participation rate in B2S, whereas 42% of students whose mother tongue is a South Asian language participated.

When these results were presented to the stakeholder focus group, participants offered a number of explanations for why eligible students may not have participated in the program, including:

- **Family obligations after school**, such as having to look after younger siblings at home.
- **Cultural reasons.** Some parents may not have understood why their child would stay behind at the end of the school day. Other parents may not allow their daughters to participate in programs that are co-ed.
- **Cliqués.** If a student’s friends were not participating, it may have decreased the likelihood of student participation.
- **B2S staff turnover** may have resulted in some students not continuing their involvement with the program. Students may have declined to participate, or lost motivation if a trusted B2S staff person left.
- **Lack of awareness/incorrect information.** In some instances students may have incorrectly assumed it was *too late to join* (e.g., if they didn’t participate in Years One-Five, students may not have realized they could still participate.) It is likely that some eligible students *did not know about B2S* despite the efforts made to inform students about the program (e.g., in Year One, B2S staff went classroom to classroom to do recruitment).

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**Key Finding:**
B2S served students who were at-risk for poor educational outcomes. B2S students’ pass rate on the OSSLT was 51%, whereas the TDSB average pass rate on the OSSLT was 71%, suggesting that B2S students were at greater risk for poor academic outcomes in their Grade 10 year.

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4 Recall that TDSB identified 114 students who were eligible for the program (i.e., wrote the OSSLT in 2007-2008), but did not receive the bursary for participating. See the page seven of this report for more information.
The question of whether B2S participants were at-risk for poor educational outcomes was examined using secondary analyses conducted by the TDSB’s Research and Information Services department:

- Performance on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Students who do not pass the OSSLT are considered at-risk for poor educational outcomes.
- Credit accumulation in Grade 10. Students who accumulate 14 or fewer credits by the end of their Grade 10 year are considered at-risk for poor educational outcomes.

This finding requires qualification. There are three tiers to examine. Some students do not even write the OSSLT; TDSB researchers know from past projects that the students at greatest risk of dropping out are those who do not write the OSSLT during their Grade 10 year. Others write the OSSLT but do not achieve a passing grade, and the third group completes the OSSLT and passes it.

Although B2S participants were less likely than their peers from the TDSB to pass the OSSLT, they were more likely to write it. The proportion of students who deferred, were absent or were exempt among the B2S cohort (i.e., the most at-risk students) was 5%, compared to 11% of the full TDSB Grade 10 cohort. This finding may at first seem to suggest that the students who participated in B2S were less at risk than the TDSB average. However, it is possible that by the time the OSSLT was written in Grade 10, because B2S participants were becoming more engaged in school and were absent less often, they were therefore more likely to write the test, if not pass it.

Five percent of TDSB students had accumulated 14 or fewer credits by the end of Grade 10, 8% of B2S participants had accumulated 14 or fewer credits, which suggest that a slightly greater proportion of the B2S cohort was at risk for poor educational outcomes.

![Figure 2. Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Pass Rate](image-url)
OUTCOME 1: Improved Educational Outcomes for Youth at Risk

B2S improved participants’ educational outcomes by reducing absenteeism and increasing feelings of engagement in school. The link between absenteeism and educational outcomes is well established; students with a high rate of absenteeism are less likely to graduate. In fact, research shows that in secondary school, absenteeism replaces academic performance as the leading cause of dropping out. The link between educational outcomes and feeling engaged in school is also well established. For example, students who are actively engaged during secondary school are more likely to graduate on time.

**Key Finding:**
Participation in B2S was associated with low levels of absenteeism. Although B2S students lagged behind their peers in terms of credit accumulation and success on the OSSLT, they had a low rate of absenteeism. Ninety-five percent of B2S participants had a “low” absenteeism rate in Grade 10, whereas 82% of TDSB students had a “low” absenteeism rate in Grade 10.

The finding that participation in B2S reduced absenteeism is also supported by results from the online student survey. In response to a question about their reasons for taking part in B2S, 84% of students indicated that improving their school attendance was “somewhat important” (66%) or “very important” (18%).

**Key Finding:**
B2S participants felt engaged in school: 91% of students who responded to the online survey “agreed” (61%) or “strongly agreed” (30%) that their participation in B2S made them feel more engaged in school.

**How B2S Achieved This Outcome**
Feedback obtained in the online student survey provides insight into what motivated students to take part in B2S. The program was designed to improve students’ abilities in areas that are related to improved educational outcomes.

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7 The TDSB defines “low” absenteeism as less than 10% absenteeism (i.e., less than half a day of school missed per week).
- Ninety-four percent of students indicated that improving study skills was a “very important” (74%) or a “somewhat important” (20%) reason for taking part in B2S.
- Ninety-eight percent of students indicated that improving their ability to complete homework was a “very important” (72%) or “somewhat important” (26%) reason for taking part in B2S.
- Ninety-three percent of students indicated that improving their marks was a “very important” (73%) or “somewhat important” (20%) reason for taking part in B2S.
OUTCOME 2: Improved Rate of Graduation

Two sources of TDSB data support the conclusion that B2S improved the rate of graduation among program participants:

The percentage of students who graduated at the end of Year Four, and
The graduation rate of students who had 14 credits at the end of Grade 10. Students with 14 or fewer credits at the end of Grade 10 are less likely to graduate after four years.

**Key Finding**
B2S students graduated at a rate similar to the TDSB average. Despite the fact that many Bridge to Success students were at-risk early in their high school careers, 61% of the B2S cohort graduated from high school at the end of Year Four. This rate is very close to the TDSB average of 63%.

**Key Finding**
B2S students with low credit accumulation were more likely to graduate than the TDSB students with low credit accumulation. Only 28% of TDSB students with 14 credits in Grade 10 graduated in Year Four, whereas 42% of B2S participants with 14 credits in Grade 10 graduated in Year Four.

**Key Finding**
B2S Students who did not graduate after four years were more likely to stay in school than their peers in other schools. At the end of Year Four, 24% of B2S participants who did not graduate were still in the TDSB system (i.e., either at NACI or another TDSB school), whereas 20% of TDSB students who did not graduate after four years were still in the TDSB system.

Although the difference between the two groups is small (4%), it nonetheless suggests that participation in B2S can have a positive effect on students’ graduation rates; students are more likely to remain for a fifth year of secondary school, therefore improving the likelihood of graduation.

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8 Because this figure is based on a small number of students, it is important to note that in raw numbers, the 42% of B2S participants with 14 credits in Grade 10 who graduated in Year Four, is 5 (i.e., 5 of the 12 B2S students who had 14 credits in Grade 10 graduated in Year Four).
Key Finding:
Students with a “high” level of participation in B2S had a higher rate of graduation. All B2S activities were voluntary. B2S participants were free to choose how and when they participated in the program. As part of this evaluation, B2S staff rated each student’s overall level of participation (across their four or five years) as high, medium, or low. Seventy-seven percent of students whose participation was rated as “high” by B2S staff graduated in Year Four, whereas 67% of students whose participation was rated as “low” graduated in Year Four.

How B2S Achieved This Outcome
Several additional results obtained from the online student survey show that participation in B2S was related to other academic success factors:

- Eighty per cent of students “agreed” (41%) or “strongly agreed” (39%) that participation in B2S made them feel more motivated to pursue post-secondary education.
- Eighty-seven per cent of students indicated that increasing their knowledge about the educational opportunities available after high school was a “very important” (61%) or a “somewhat important” (26%) reason for their involvement in the program.
- One hundred per cent of students indicated that it was “somewhat true” (43%) or “very true” (57%) that B2S provided them the information necessary to pursue their educational and career goals.
- Ninety-one per cent of students indicated that they “agreed” (57%) or “strongly agreed” (34%) that B2S helped them to develop personal goals for their education and/or career.

At the stakeholder focus group, B2S staff reported that the one-to-one time they spent with students was often focused on “planning for the future.” As students came to recognize new possibilities, the B2S staff helped gather information and helped the students form achievable
goals. In Year Five of the program, staff endeavoured to work closely with students who were not on track to graduate. In those cases, B2S staff sought to link the student back to NACI guidance counselors by encouraging the student to look into the possibility of credit recovery.  

When asked how B2S had influenced the plans that students were making for the future, one focus group participant said:

“When you get to go to certain programs…you get to see people and they kind of motivate you do to better as well. It really opens your mind and gives you an idea of what you want to be and how you’re going to get there.”

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9 According to the TDSB website, credit recovery improves at-risk students’ academic record to the point where they begin to see that a graduation diploma is not an unrealistic goal and are more likely to continue to stay engaged in school. Credit Recovery is an option when a student has completed a course within the school year or semester, but has not successfully completed the curriculum expectations to a passing level. The Principal and teaching staff, in consultation with the parents and the student, determine how to best enable the student to meet the expectations and earn credit for the course. (http://www.tdgb.on.ca/hsite/viewitem.asp?siteid=110&menuid=3905&pageid=3237).
TDSB data show that in 2010-2011, NACI graduates who participated in B2S were attending post-secondary education at a rate comparable to the TDSB average.

**Key Finding:**
B2S students had post-secondary enrollment rates equal to the TDSB average: 88% of B2S students who graduated in Year Four were enrolled in post-secondary education (PSE), whereas 89% of TDSB graduates were enrolled in PSE.

Furthermore, B2S graduates were enrolled in college and university in similar proportions to the TDSB averages:

- The percentage of B2S graduates enrolled in college was 37%, whereas the percentage of TDSB graduates enrolled in college was 40%.
- The percentage of B2S graduates enrolled in university was 51%, whereas the percentage of TDSB graduates enrolled in university was 49%.

![Figure 4. Post-Secondary Education Participation Rates](image-url)
When Year Five B2S students were asked what they planned to do after secondary school, 92% reported that they planned to continue their education.

- Forty per cent reported that they planned to attend college
- Fifty-two per cent reported that they planned to attend university.

**How B2S Achieved this Outcome**
Several additional results from the online student survey suggest that participation in B2S was related to factors linked to pursuing post-secondary education:

- Eighty-nine per cent of students indicated that they “agreed” (54%) or “strongly agreed” (35%) that they **were more confident in their ability to continue their education** as a result of their participation in B2S.
- B2S helped students **identify and minimize barriers to post-secondary education.** The main three barriers were low grades, lack of finances and lack of direction/awareness of programs.
OUTCOME 4: Improved Life Skills

Although educational outcomes were the primary focus of B2S, the program also recognized the need to lessen the social risks faced by many NACI students. When responding to an interview question about the challenges NACI students face, one teacher said:

“…You see family situations where there’s not a lot of support. Parents working various shifts and students are looking after a brother or sister before they have to come to school. If they have homework, there’s not an adult there that can assist them. [Some] kids are not happy at home. There’s tension at home. Some of them are even kicked out of their homes. It’s a mixed bag. Sometimes there are cultural things. Sometimes the girls feel unsupported at home… I see males who are disinterested and haven’t got a lot of direction. Lack motivation. They don’t have the frame of reference and habits, somebody at home encouraging them to do their work.”

Results from several items on the online student survey suggest that B2S helped students to develop life skills and personal competencies:

- 63% of students indicated that improving their relationships with other students was a “somewhat important” (35%) or a “very important” (28%) reason for taking part in B2S
- 58% of students indicated that improving their relationships with teachers/staff was a “somewhat important” (40%) or a “very important” (18%) reason for taking part in B2S
- 59% of students indicated that they “agreed” (39%) or “strongly agreed” (20%) that they were better prepared to search for a job due to their participation in B2S
- 85% of students indicated that they “agreed” (54%) or “strongly agreed” (31%) that they were more informed about the services available in their community.

Developing Leadership Skills
In the student focus group, the theme of leadership skill development came up when students were asked to reflect on what stood out most about their experiences with the program:

“…overall, everybody got a little bit of opportunity to learn how to be a leader in some sense. As opposed to the leaders (B2S staff) always just being the leaders.”

“…a couple of years back when…we had to organize the summer camp. We had to plan activities and take people a year or two younger than us to the gym, outside, and do activities. That was one where I learned to plan more efficiently.”
How B2S Achieved this Outcome
During the stakeholder focus group, B2S Staff reported that their one-to-one time with students frequently involved making referrals to outside services, including:

- Health care
- Counseling and mental health services
- Immigration services
- Child care

B2S activities were often geared toward exposing students to the wider world beyond their neighbourhood and beyond NACI. To this end, staff took B2S participants on a number of field trips, including:

- Art shows
- Ballet
- Sailing

Furthermore, during the B2S March break camp, participants had the opportunity to learn practical skills such as:

- Refereeing
- CPR
- Safe food handling
- How to DJ

Commenting on the types of activities B2S participants were exposed to, one NACI teacher said:

“[B2S] Extended the students’ horizons into the community. They had opportunities to attend summer camp, go to museums, [go to] Canada’s Wonderland. The students’ art was featured in a show and exhibited at the TDSB. This gave the students a sense of pride about the work they were doing. People recognized them as worthy.”

Describing the changes he saw in male students who participated in Boys Club, another NACI teacher said:

“I didn’t sit in on the [Boys Club] sessions, obviously they were supposed to be private sessions, but I certainly heard a lot of what was going on and could see a lot of what was going on. And I find that a lot of our males are disconnected. They have no sense of direction in terms of what it means to be a man. And I found that it was really really helpful to have a positive person like Xavier here. A living example of a young man who was trying to make it in the world and had challenges that he had to navigate through and overcome and he basically shared his experiences with them and brought in a whole bunch of guest speakers and talked to them about what it means to be a man and how to relate to women. He destroyed a lot of stereotypes that they had about what it means to be a man. He tried to get them to think empathetically. He tried to get them to think a little bit about being more empathetic in relationships and loving themselves enough to respect others.”
OUTCOME 5: Improved Connection to Community

B2S participants were connected to many volunteer opportunities over the course of the program. B2S staff connected students to opportunities beyond the 40 hours of required community service. In the fall of their fourth year, B2S participants had accumulated an average of 77 community hours per student. According to B2S staff, the goal of these volunteer opportunities was twofold:

1. to expose students to the wider world outside of their neighbourhood;
2. to spark students’ passion for giving back to the community.

Examples of the types of volunteer involvement B2S participants engaged in included:

- Giving a presentation on “How to be a student at NACI” to students at a NACI feeder school
- Developing a PowerPoint presentation on sexual health for students that was delivered in conjunction with Toronto Public Health
- Volunteering at Doors Open Toronto venues across the city
- Organizing a community cleanup day.

B2S also made a positive contribution to the community in several additional ways. For example, B2S students’ artwork was displayed at a community event, which created an opportunity for community members to view NACI students in a positive light. Over the course of the B2S project, MicroSkills periodically advertised student achievements in the local newspaper; a list of the names of students who were moving on to post-secondary education was published.

The benefits of student participation in Bridge to Success sometimes also led to positive steps for parents. After discussions with B2S staff about their children, some parents were referred to MicroSkills’ program for adults. At the model building session, B2S staff reported that one parent had completed his/her GED.

Bridge to Success also had a specific impact on the community within NACI. For example, during the stakeholder focus group, participants reported that B2S students have had a particularly strong influence on Grade 9 students. The Grade 9 students see the older students being engaged in the academic and social aspects of school and the older students act as mentors. Simple things, such as supervising the younger students in the gym after

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10 In order to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, students must complete 40 hours of community service over the course of their high school career.
school, helped foster positive connections. The phrase “taking the Grade 9's under their wing” was frequently used to describe these interactions.

In response to an item on the online student survey, 96% of students said they would be interested in continuing their involvement with B2S.
Revised Programming and Recommendations

Bridge to Success students were, on average, at a moderate level of risk for poor educational outcomes early in their secondary school careers. The results of this summative evaluation suggest that B2S participants became more engaged with school, were more likely to graduate after four years, and (if they did not graduate) were more likely to return to school for a fifth year. B2S students developed important life skills through the program, and also became more engaged in their community. These trends were visible in school board statistics, but they were also supported by the reports of teachers, B2S staff, and in particular, the B2S participants themselves. B2S students who have completed secondary school have gone on to attend post-secondary education at a rate very close to the board-wide average, suggesting that their experience with B2S helped them to overcome the obstacles they faced at the beginning of their high school careers.

Updating the B2S Program Logic Model
At the time of the summative evaluation, the Bridge to Success program was in its fifth year of operation. Over time, the program model was adapted to respond to the changing needs of students and the information gathered through the interim evaluation conducted in 2009.

In May 2011, a half-day session was held with key project stakeholders. The purpose of this meeting was to develop a more up-to-date description of program theory by reviewing and revising the Bridge to Success program logic model. Eleven participants representing the following stakeholder groups took part: MicroSkills staff (2), Bridge to Success staff (3), NACI staff (1), United Way Toronto staff (1), B2S student participants (4).

Participants were asked to react to the program logic model that was created at the beginning of the project and the discussion focused on four key questions:

- How does B2S work and who does it reach?
- How does B2S help students (i.e., what outcomes is the program achieving)?
- What are the most important components in the model and what is missing from the model?
- Where do we go from here?

Figure 7 shows a version of the B2S logic model that was created in 2008, at the time when students were in their second year of high school. In that model, program activities and outcomes were divided into two major categories: academic support and social support.
Stakeholders’ feedback in May 2011 resulted in several important changes to the model. Participants felt that the overall philosophy of Bridge to Success was not captured in the original list of program components, so a series of “principles” and “key aspects” was added to the model.

Inputs were also added to the model. This addition highlighted the fact that United Way resources were directed primarily to clubs, the bursary, 1:1 support and special programs (e.g., March Break camp). Other key elements of B2S (including the snack program, community services, and tutoring) were made possible through in-kind donations and volunteer hours.
Figure 6a: Updated B2S Logic Model, Part 1

Bridge to Success Model

Principles Underlying the B2S Model

- No eligibility rules - Universal
- Open-ended entry
- Outreach to students
- Starts in Gr. 9 - Evolves over time
- B2S Neutral: In school but not “the school”

Key Aspects of Program Delivery

- Safe space to socialize
- Space for Homework
- Staff Consistency
- Mentoring Philosophy
- Parent Engagement
- Communication with NACI

Inputs

- NACI In-kind
- Food
- B2S Staff (UWT-funded)
- TDSB Tutors
- Volunteers
- Other Funders
- Bursary Fund (UWT)
- NACI In-kind
- Food
- B2S Staff (UWT-funded)

Program Components

- Snack Program
- Clubs
- Tutoring
- Community Services
- Bursary
- Special Activities (e.g. March break camp)
- 1:1 Support
In the updated version of the model, the key short-term outcomes are expressed in more focused language. Bridge to Success achieved medium-term educational outcomes through efforts to increase self-efficacy (or the belief that post-secondary education is possible), study skills, social relationships, and life skills.

**Additions**

In the updated model, “Food” was added as an “input,” and “Address Hunger” was added as a short-term outcome. “Integration of newcomer students” was also added as a short-term outcome of the program. Because these two short-term outcomes were not identified until May 2011, they were not formally evaluated. However, data collected in the model building session, in the telephone interviews with teachers and in the focus group with students, provided important insights into the roles that food played in contributing to the program outcomes, as well as how the program helped newcomer students to integrate.
**The Role of Food**

A snack was consistently offered to students during program time. Over the course of the program, B2S staff also made food available to students before school and at lunch. B2S staff found that for many students, food was the initial “hook” into the program. However, over time, the draw became the activities themselves. Furthermore, students who did not require academic support could still come by after school to have a snack and socialize. In the student focus group session, when asked what they found most helpful about B2S, one student said that it was the availability of healthy snacks.

B2S staff reported that food was a mechanism for bringing students together. In other words, food helped to facilitate social connections among students who may not otherwise have interacted at NACI.

B2S also created a strong connection between food and life skills. For example, students had the opportunity to learn how to cook nutritious meals. Staff reported that many students went home and cooked the recipes for their families. In this sense, the program also had a trickle-down effect whereby students’ families also learned about nutrition and the importance of eating balanced meals.

During the model building session and in the teacher interviews, a limitation of the breakfast program offered at NACI (i.e., not part of B2S) was raised: some students find the breakfast program stigmatizing because in order to participate, a coupon must be presented. According to one teacher, a key strength of the B2S model is that students’ access to food was not limited to a specific timeframe:

> “We have a breakfast program here Monday to Friday, 8:00-8:30. The reality is that they’re not going to be hungry during a defined period of time. They’re going to be hungry, for example, in period two which is between 10:00-11:30 right before lunch. Sometimes they’re hungry during lunch, I see them roaming the halls. You know they don’t have money for the cafeteria so they just hang around. Hunger for me is a thing that I think the school needs to get better at supporting. Making food available throughout the day either at a nominal cost, or free.”

**Newcomer Student Integration**

During the model building session, B2S Staff reported that the integration of newcomer students was an important short-term outcome of the program. In particular, the Homework Club provided opportunities for newcomer students to come together with other students to practice their English-language skills. B2S ran an orientation program which included activities such as showing newcomer students how to use the transit system. B2S also created opportunities for newcomer students to obtain Canadian work experience, for example, by acting as (unpaid) peer tutors during Homework Club.
Key Components of the B2S Program

Taken together, the results from all five data sources used in the summative evaluation suggest that the following aspects of B2S were key to achieving the five outcomes:

- Homework Club
- Location and accessibility
- Exceptional staff
- Financial reward
- Food

**Homework Club**

In the teacher interviews, the student focus group and at the model building session, participants consistently highlighted the key role of the Homework Club within the Bridge to Success program model. At the model building session, participants referred to the Homework Club as the “central pillar” of B2S. Student participants reported several aspects of the Homework Club that made it particularly effective, including:

- **It was convenient.** Homework assistance was available even if a teacher was not. Students also commented that they were sometimes reluctant to go looking for a teacher after school hours, but they knew they could show up at Homework Club and someone would be there to answer questions.
- **It was consistent.** Homework Club was offered in the same place at the same time each day.

Although the primary focus of the Homework Club pertained to fulfilling Outcome One, “improve the educational outcomes of at-risk youth,” the qualitative results from interviews, the focus group and the model building session suggest that there were additional positive outcomes related to Homework Club:

- Students knew they could go to Homework Club to receive one-on-one assistance from B2S staff about personal issues.
- Students who did not have homework questions could still attend Homework Club as a safe place to socialize after school hours. B2S staff reported that early on in the program they realized that many students were showing up to socialize. In response, they created what became known as “the back room,” which was a place where students could go to socialize without disrupting those who were there to study.
- The collaborative model of Homework Club (i.e., working in small groups to complete homework) helped to build relationships among students who may not otherwise have interacted at NACI. As one student described it, “it built respect for people even if they were not your friends.”
- Homework Club also provided an opportunity for students to act as peer mentors.

In response to a question on the online student survey about the usefulness of B2S activities, 100% of students reported that Homework Club was “very useful” (69%) or “useful” (31%). When asked for suggestions about how to improve the program, a few students suggested that homework club could be offered more often (e.g., during exams and on Fridays).
Location Inside the School
Stakeholders reported that offering B2S in the school was a key feature of the program’s success, primarily because it removed barriers to participation. For example, one NACI teacher who participated in a telephone interview said:

“It’s very important because if you remove it from this site, it gives students more reasons to come up with for why they can’t be there. But, if you say “meet me in the library for the homework club”… you remove a lot of the excuses for not getting things done.”

Another NACI teacher offered the insight that locating the program within the school also removed barriers related to finances and motivation:

“Students seem to have difficulty, whether it’s financially or motivation, getting to programs outside of the school.”

A third NACI teacher felt very strongly about the importance of offering B2S within the school, stating:

“[The] Program has to be within the school. It’s essential. It’s part of establishing trust with the school. There are people who care about you here. This is a safe place.”

In addition to removing barriers to student participation, a key advantage of having B2S located within NACI was that a strong partnership developed between B2S staff and NACI staff. Discussing the relationship between B2S staff and teachers at NACI, one teacher interviewed said:

“She [B2S staff person] came to [NACI] staff meetings and she basically said to all the teachers, “Look, we’re here to support you, and if there are any students you feel should be in the after school homework program, let me know. I will make sure that the work gets done.”

Also commenting on the relationship between B2S staff and NACI staff, another NACI teacher said:

“The relationship between teachers and staff is really good. They didn’t alienate themselves from us. They shared what was going on, what programs were going on. They had sessions where they’d invite teachers to show us what kinds of things they’re doing with the students.”

Bursary
During the stakeholder focus group, student participants reported that although $1,000 is not a large sum of money when it comes to offsetting the cost of post-secondary education, “money is money” and every bit helps. Students liked that they were eligible for the bursary with no strings attached, i.e., eligibility was tied to participation in the program, but not to academic
performance. However, students also reported that the bursary was not their primary motivation for participating in B2S and that they thought the program would still be successful even if a smaller amount of money was disbursed (e.g., $500 versus $1,000).

In response to an item in the online student survey about reasons for taking part in B2S, 89% of students indicated that receiving the money for college or university was a “very important” (78%) or a “somewhat important” (11%) reason for their involvement in the program. Recall that the online survey was conducted in Year Five of the program, when students had either already graduated from NACI or were in their final year of high school. Therefore, the reported importance of the bursary may have been elevated at that time because students had reached a point where the cost of post-secondary education would likely be more salient.

In response to a telephone interview question about the bursary, one NACI teacher stated:

“I have seen situations where students didn’t feel they had any ability to get the resources they need to do what they want to do in the future. I’ve seen situations where they’ve (B2S Staff) made available options for employment or bursaries or grants for different things.”

Exceptional Staff
It was clear from the feedback of all stakeholder groups that B2S’s success could in large part be attributed to the qualities of B2S staff, who performed their roles exceptionally. Adjectives used to describe B2S staff included “passionate,” “relatable,” “someone who’s there for you,” “someone who makes you want to do better,” “a role model,” genuine,” and “consistent.”

It was also noted that it was valuable having B2S staff who were from the community in which NACI is located. In addition to this being a feature that made the staff member more relatable to students (i.e., being “from” the same place), two further benefits were noted:

- Knowledge of the local community meant that these staff members were better equipped to refer students to local services and programs; and
- These B2S staff were able to help keep NACI staff (who may not live in the community themselves) informed about local issues and events that impact students.

The finding that B2S staff were highly motivated and consistently exceeded expectations could impact the replicability of the results achieved at NACI.

Adapting the B2S Program Model for Future Use
At the logic model session held in May, stakeholders reflected on the end of the program for the first B2S cohort, and discussed the possibilities for adapting the model in the future so that it produces the maximum social return on investment. Some of the questions that arose during this discussion were:

- Should B2S target its services more narrowly at youth at higher risk, or continue to be open to all students?
Should B2S target a single cohort year, or should it serve students in all grades?
How important is the bursary to the success of B2S?
Should B2S incorporate new elements, such as more intensive outreach to parents, or support for students transitioning from high school directly into the workforce?
Which components of B2S are best provided by paid staff, and what skill sets do those paid staff require? Can some functions (e.g., tutoring) be provided by volunteers with the right staff support?

One of the key decisions that United Way Toronto faces is whether to continue offering Bridge to Success to a single grade-based cohort of students or whether to open the program up to students at all grade levels. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that there are advantages associated with each option.

**Advantages of offering B2S to a single grade cohort**
- Program participants were of a similar age, and therefore, as one of the model building session participants put it, “They grow through the program together and know each other.”
- The cohort approach increased the balance between students who were at-risk and those who were at lower risk. This was advantageous because it meant that students who were a positive influence interacted with higher-risk students and could act as role models.
- Because the program was offered to the entire cohort (i.e., universal eligibility), those who participated were less likely to be stigmatized for being labeled “at-risk.”

**Advantages of offering B2S to students in all grades**
- The most obvious advantage of offering the program to students in all grades would be that more students could take advantage of the support B2S offers. It was noted in the 2009 mid-term report that B2S staff were frequently asked if students in other grades could participate in the program. Although B2S staff came up with innovative ways of providing limited support to other students, the program’s mandate and resources limited their capacity to respond fully to this need.
- During the model building session, stakeholders suggested that for students in Grades 9 and 10, B2S could focus on offering programming (e.g., Homework Club, Boy/Girls Club), whereas for students in Grades 11 and 12, the focus could be more individualized (e.g., development of personal action plans for students).
- A major advantage of the program being available to all students is it creates opportunities for students at different levels of risk to interact. As one participant at the model building session stated, “The program needs all types of students. The students who are doing better act as role models, mentors and peer tutors to those who are struggling.”

**Challenges of offering B2S to students in all grades**
If B2S is made available to students in all grades, it may be necessary to hire additional staff or to engage additional community partners in order to meet the accompanying increase in demand.
It was suggested during the model building session that teachers could be more directly involved in the homework club, and that community agencies could be approached to involve volunteers in specific types of programming (e.g., art and cooking programming).

Another possibility for bolstering the program’s resources would be to leverage the willingness of NACI graduates to stay connected to the program as volunteers.

Regardless of whether the cohort model is maintained or a shift is made to open eligibility for all grades, stakeholders offered the caution that eligibility based on students being deemed at-risk is problematic because of the stigmatizing effects of labeling.

**Moving forward**

It may be useful in the future to conceptualize B2S as a cluster of related interventions, where:

- One component is a staff-driven, structured, and universal group program for students in Grade 9 and 10.
- Another component is a volunteer-driven tutoring program.
- A third component is an intensive coaching program targeting senior students who are at higher levels of risk.
- Other, less resource-intensive elements like community outings, visits from community agencies, volunteering experiences, and food-based programs may support these core elements.

Given that stakeholders identified clear advantages associated with both options, further consultation on this issue may be required in order for UWT to reach a decision.

**Recommendations**

**Formalize and evaluate the role of food in the program**
At the logic modeling session held in May 2011, “food” was identified as a key component of the program model. Stakeholders reported that B2S staff was able to do much with the limited resources allocated for food. For example, a NACI teacher who participated in a telephone interview commented “I don’t know how he (B2S staff) fed all those kids on the amount of money that he had. But he did a fantastic job of feeding them healthy food.” Given that food has been identified as a core component of the program, it may be necessary to increase the resources allocated to it. One option may be to find community partners willing to offer support.

**Conduct student recruitment and outreach efforts on an ongoing basis**
Recruitment and outreach to students and school staff should be ongoing (i.e., not just concentrated at program start-up). One of the teachers interviewed for this report commented that many of the newer NACI teachers are not aware that B2S exists. The recruitment and outreach strategies used during the five years of the project may also need to be adapted to reach a wider range of students. The feedback that was provided at the stakeholder model building session may be useful in developing new outreach strategies.
Explore the possibility of offering a career mentorship component
A central objective of B2S was to encourage graduating students to apply to post-secondary education. However, some B2S staff and NACI teachers felt that more could be done to help students explore other options that are available to them after high school, such as apprenticeship programs (e.g., careers in the skilled trades).

Explore options for formalizing the role of parents
In the Bridge to Success program model, the role of parents is limited and unstructured. Over the course of the program, B2S staff primarily interacted with participants’ parents in situations where there was a concern about a student. At the model building session, B2S staff reported that early on in the project they offered an eight-week workshop to participants’ parents, and 12 parents attended regularly. The focus of workshops was on building parents’ knowledge about how the school system works. While B2S staff received positive feedback about the workshops from parents, parents did report that it was difficult to commit the amount of time required for the weekly sessions. Research has shown that family involvement is one of the most important contributors to school success and completion. According to the U.S.-based National Parent Teacher Association (2001)\(^\text{11}\), when a student’s family is involved she/he is more likely to: attend school regularly, display positive attitudes about school, graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary programs. It is therefore recommended that options for formalizing the role of parents be considered.

Conclusion

Since B2S began in 2006, the resources provided by United Way Toronto have been leveraged in a number of creative ways to provide support to participating students. The staff at NACI believe in Bridge to Success, and the team at MicroSkills has been unfailing in their efforts to sustain and expand the model. Even more importantly, the students themselves credit the program with enabling them to succeed.

One of B2S’s key strengths was the fact that it was embedded within the school: the program was physically located in the school library, and program staff built close working relationships with vice principals, guidance counselors, and teachers. The program was accessible to students throughout the school day and it was adapted to quickly to meet the changing needs of students over the course of their high school career. Quantitative evaluation findings make it clear that the program staff succeeded in engaging with students who were at risk for poor educational outcomes, and that they helped those students build protective factors like self-efficacy and learning skills. On average, B2S students improved their graduation rates and progression to post-secondary education.

Bridge to Success is an effective program for improving the educational outcomes of at-risk youth. The results thus far are promising; the program can be replicated in other schools and adapted to meet the changing needs of the students. B2S has had a positive impact on its participants; Bridge to Success created the opportunity for students become more actively involved in their school, their community and in planning their own futures.
Appendix A
Bridge to Success Program Evaluation: Current NACI Students

1. Hello and Welcome to the Bridge to Success Program Evaluation

The purpose of this survey is to gather feedback on the Bridge to Success (B2S) program. This feedback will be used to better understand the successes, challenges, and learnings of this pilot project, and to make recommendations.

As a student at North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI) and participant in the Bridge to Success program, you are invited to complete this survey. We are interested in learning about your experiences with the program and your impressions of the different activities in which you participate.

The survey was designed and implemented by Taylor Newberry Consulting and it will take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Your individual responses will remain confidential. No one other than the researchers at Taylor Newberry Consulting will have access to your individual responses.

If you have any questions or comments about this survey, please contact Andrew Taylor at: andrew.taylor060@sympatico.ca or 519-546-4789.

I understand the purpose of this survey and I am willing to participate. I know that my name will not be attached to this survey and that my responses will be anonymous.

2. Questions for B2S Participants

1. Why did you decide to come back to NACI this year? (Check all that apply).
   - To get the credits necessary to graduate
   - To upgrade my marks
   - To improve my English language skills

2. In which of the following Bridge to Success activities do you participate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>A Few Times</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys/Girls Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational and Life Skills</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Informally with B2S Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Bridge to Success Program Evaluation: Current NACI Students

#### 3. How useful are these activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not at all Useful</th>
<th>Not very Useful</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Club</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys/Girls Club</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational and Life Skills Workshops</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Club</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Informally with B2S Staff</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)

#### 4. In your opinion, what would make any or all of these activities more useful?


## Bridge to Success Program Evaluation: Current NACI Students

### 5. You may have more than one reason for taking part in the B2S program. Why do you participate in Bridge 2 Success?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve my marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get along better with other students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get along better with teachers and school staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my school attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my study skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my ability to complete homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn how to get a job</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To learn about my options for college or university</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To get money for college or university</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To get 1:1 support from B2S staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Bridge to Success Program Evaluation: Current NACI Students

### 6. How has participating in B2S helped you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel more engaged in school</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get along better with other students</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm learning about the educational opportunities that are available after high school</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm more motivated to pursue further education</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm developing personal goals for my education/career</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm more confident in my ability to continue my education</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm better prepared to search for a job</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm learning about the services available in the community</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please tell us about any other ways B2S impacted you.

---

### 7. B2S is providing me with the information I need to pursue my educational and career goals

- ○ Not at all true
- ○ Not very true
- ○ Uncertain
- ○ Somewhat true
- ○ Very true
8. B2S is providing me with the training I need to pursue my educational and career goals
   ○ Not at all true
   ○ Not very true
   ○ Uncertain
   ○ Somewhat true
   ○ Very true

9. B2S is providing me with the support and encouragement I need to pursue my educational and career goals
   ○ Not at all true
   ○ Not very true
   ○ Uncertain
   ○ Somewhat true
   ○ Very true

10. B2S is providing me with the skills I need to get a job
    ○ Not at all true
    ○ Not very true
    ○ Uncertain
    ○ Somewhat true
    ○ Very true

11. If you could improve something about the B2S program, what would it be and why?
12. What are your plans after you finish high school (Check all that apply).
- [ ] Attend Private Career College Full-time
- [ ] Attend Private Career College Part-time
- [ ] Attend College Full-time
- [ ] Attend College Part-time
- [ ] Attend University Full-time
- [ ] Attend University Part-time
- [ ] Work Full-time
- [ ] Work Part-time
- [ ] I'm undecided about my plans at this time
- Other (please specify)

13. Which of the following might keep you from pursuing further education?
- [ ] Grades not high enough/Not accepted
- [ ] Financial reasons
- [ ] Want to work
- [ ] Not enough interest/motivation
- [ ] Family responsibility
- [ ] It takes too long
- [ ] Not sure what I want to do

Please tell us about any other reasons why you decided not to go to College or University.

14. Are you interested in continuing your involvement with B2S after you graduate from NACI?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

15. If yes, in what ways? (Check all that apply).
- [ ] As a mentor
- [ ] As a tutor
- [ ] As a volunteer
- [ ] Just to stay in touch
### Bridge to Success Program Evaluation: Current NACI Students

16. **Sex**
- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

17. **Country of birth**

18. **Language spoken most frequently at home**

19. **When did you start high school?**
- [ ] 2006
- [ ] 2007
- [ ] 2008

20. **What was your first year at NACI?**
- [ ] 2006-2007
- [ ] 2007-2008
- [ ] 2008-2009

21. **Please check the years that you participated in Bridge to Success (Check all that apply).**
- [ ] 2006-2007
- [ ] 2007-2008
- [ ] 2008-2009
- [ ] 2009-2010
- [ ] 2010-2011

### 3. Thank You

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you have any additional questions, comments or concerns about this survey, please contact Andrew Taylor (Taylor Newberry Consulting) at andrew.taylor060@sympatico.ca or 519-546-4789.

We appreciate your time and feedback.
Appendix B
Bridge to Success Program Evaluation: Students Focus Group Protocol

1. What is it like to be a student at NACI? What’s good about it? What isn’t so good?

2. Why did you decide to come back to NACI this year?

3. What motivated you to participate in the Bridge to Success Program?

   Probes:
   - Improve marks
   - Get along better with other students
   - Get along better with teachers/school staff
   - Improve attendance
   - Improve study skills
   - Get homework done
   - Learn how to get a job
   - Learn about options for college or university
   - Money for college/university
   - To get one-on-one support from B2S staff

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience with the program?

   Probe:
   - Strengths and weaknesses of B2S?

5. Which Bridge to Success activities have you participated in?

   Probes:
   - Leadership Club
   - Boys/Girls Club
   - Motivational/life skills workshops
   - Homework Club
   - Tutoring
   - Talking informally with B2S Staff

6. Did you get connected with any community programs through B2S? If so, which ones and how were you involved?
7. Did Bridge to Success help you? If so, how?

Probes:
- Grades
- Attendance
- Self-esteem
- Conflict with teachers or the principal
- Career or post secondary education planning
- Sense of connectedness to the school (e.g., involvement in extra-curricular activities)
- Job search skills
- Knowledge about community resources
- Knowledge about educational opportunities

8. If you had to choose just one, which B2S activity would you say helped you the most?

9. What do you think NACI would be like if B2S was not there?

10. What are your plans for after you leave NACI?

11. What is the most challenging thing about making plans for when you leave NACI?

12. Has your experience with Bridge to Success influenced your plans for after high school? If so, how?

13. Are you getting a bursary from B2S? If so, what are you planning to use it for?

14. Unlike Bridge to Success, which is offered in your school, sometimes other programs are offered in the community, for example in a recreation centre. Do you think your participation in the program was influenced by having B2S in the school?

15. In what ways could B2S be improved?
Appendix C
Bridge to Success Program Evaluation:
Interview Protocol for Program Staff

1. How long have you been a teacher at NACI?

2. As a teacher at NACI, what are your perceptions of the Bridge to Success Program?

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the B2S program activities

   Probes:
   - Leadership Club
   - Boys/Girls Club
   - Motivational and Life skills workshops
   - Homework Club
   - Tutoring
   - Informal interactions with students

4. If you had to choose just one, which B2S activity would you say helps students the most?

5. What are your perceptions of the effectiveness of the program when it comes to:

   Probes:
   - The program being located within NACI?
   - The involvement of community-based organizations?
   - Support for parents?
   - The bursary?

6. Since the B2S program began, have you noticed any changes in students?

   Probes:
   - Social behavior
   - Self-esteem
   - School attendance
   - Academic achievements
   - Knowledge (of community programs and of educational opportunities)
7. How would you describe the working relationship between NACI teachers and B2S staff?

8. How could B2S be improved?

9. Do you have any additional comments or questions?