Transitions: Programs to Encourage British Columbia Students to Stay in School

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Executive Summary

Transitions is a study concerned with what can be done to help increase the likelihood that British Columbia students stay on in secondary school. This report presents a preliminary exploration of stay-in-school programs in British Columbia schools and is intended to support the development of further learning about what works in this area through rigorous evaluations of promising interventions.

Dropping out of school is associated with negative consequences for young Canadians. Students who leave school without graduating are less likely to succeed in the labour market, more likely to become reliant on welfare, and more likely to face barriers in other areas of their lives. Three groups of students have been a particular focus of this study: teenage parents, First Nations students, and students from low-income families.

There are many theoretical perspectives for why students drop out of school. These can be summarized as

- lacking a feeling of belonging in school,

- being unable to adjust to the school environment,

- being stigmatized,

- being unable to attend during the fixed hours and routines of the school day,

- finding little connection between life in and out of school,

- being too poor to attend or to concentrate,

- being left behind by or under-stimulated by the pace of learning,

- having a learning style that does not conform to the prevalent teaching process,

- being unable to connect with educational goals, and

- needing more explicit rewards than those inherent in attending school and learning.

While many stay-in-school programs operating in Canada reflect these perspectives, firm lessons are few because evaluations have rarely sought conclusive findings. Some models have been tested in the United States, notably "Career Academies" to enhance the relevance of education, student–teacher teams to ease adjustment to secondary school, and community-based case managers to connect school with home and engage students in productive after-school activities. All have met with partial success.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) visited six British Columbia schools and observed 24 programs encompassing a range of different program structures. These ranged from in-school programs focused on keeping students in contact with mainstream education to alternate programs conducting wholly separate classes both on and off the school site. These programs were found to share a range of 36 common components including low staffing ratios (small class sizes), access to a caring adult, an

emphasis in teaching style on making education relevant, and altered expectations of both teachers and students compared with the mainstream.

These components were linked to the different perspectives on why students drop out. It was apparent that the students targeted had different unmet needs and different reasons for dropping out, and hence programs offered a variety of components in different combinations. Typically, alternate programs emphasized the creation of a supportive and welcoming environment, developing a more personalized focus, and reinforcing positive behaviour. Programs supporting students' schooling in the mainstream tended to alter the way the school as an institution presented itself to students through modified curricula, reduction in stigma, and timetable flexibility. Different student groups were the subjects of different forms of intervention, with the supportive environment of mini-school alternate programs most common for teenage parents and First Nations students.

In the absence of outcome data for students, drawing inferences about the success of programs was difficult. Programs differed in the extent to which they judged their own success in terms of implementation, behavioural, and academic outcomes. There were two main sources of validation for program components and program structures visited during fieldwork. The first was the extent of consensus among programs. The second was how far components and structures corresponded to theoretical perspectives on students dropping out of school.

The consistencies between the literature and the fieldwork suggest that interventions encompassing the following elements may have the best chance for success:

1. A strategy for change with information sharing

2. Clear goals

3. Targeted individuals and groups

4. A program design embracing most or all of the following components:

    a) An accepting and safe environment

    b) Integration into the mainstream

    c) Engagement in teaching and learning practices

    d) Flexible instructional practices or scheduling

    e) A rigorous and relevant curriculum

    f) Support and recognition for success

    g) Dedicated and competent staff

    h) Professional development opportunities

    i) Appropriate community-based programs and activities during non-school hours

    j) An ongoing and comprehensive system of program evaluation

Building a partnership among interested ministries, British Columbia schools, and other agencies would provide a unique opportunity for developing interventions that have high prospects of both enhancing the life chances of British Columbia youth and building more conclusive evidence of what works in improving educational attainment and reducing dropout rates.

1. Introduction

1.1 ABOUT *TRANSITIONS*

Transitions is a study concerned with what can be done to help increase the likelihood that British Columbia students stay on in secondary school. This report presents a preliminary exploration of stay-in-school programs in British Columbia schools and is intended to support the development of further learning about what works in this area through practical demonstration.

There is an increasing policy concern that students who leave school before graduating place themselves at a disadvantage in their future lives. They may find it more difficult to connect with the labour market and risk becoming reliant on income assistance and other government programs. It is this latter implication that is of particular interest to the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT),[1] which has supported the *Transitions* study.

The study involves two phases. The first phase is a review of the literature relevant to Canadian stay-in-school programs to seek out explanations for student behaviour and policy prescriptions for solutions.[2] The study has collected information on 50 initiatives and programs operating across Canada for evidence of what works in encouraging students to stay on in school. The second phase involves an examination, through site visits and interviews, of 24 programs currently in place in six British Columbia schools (listed in Table 1), which aim to maintain or re-establish the connection between students and secondary education. These programs differ in terms of the groups targeted and stage of high school reached and were chosen to reflect a range of approaches to dropout prevention.

Table 1: British Columbia Schools and Programs Participating in *Transitions*

School	Programs				
Britannia Community Secondary School	Aries	Mentoring Program (Britannia Project)		Outreach	8J9J
Carihi Secondary School	Community Service Co-op	Flex Program	Leadership Program	Literacy Program	Young Parents Program
Guildford Park Secondary School	Alternate Program	Growing Together		Transitions Co-op	
Norkam Secondary School	Four Directions Storefront	Peer Helpers		Work Study Program	
Prince George Secondary School	Teen Mothers' Alternative Program (TMAP)	Transitional Alternative Programs (TAPS)		Skill Support	
Vancouver Technical Secondary School	Career Preparation	Nova Program	Tumanos	Spectrum Senior Alternative	Sunrise Junior Alternative
Total Education*	Total Education				

*Total Education operates independently of local mainstream schools.

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[1] The relevant responsibility later became the remit of the newly formed British Columbia Ministry for Social Development and Economic Security (in September 1999).
[2] Time constraints meant that this review could not be exhaustive.

While many of the educational elements and services (here termed "components") offered to students are common among these programs, British Columbia schools have also been innovative in developing new programs, in varying the mix of components, and in placing emphasis on different components.

These two phases of research, reported here, are a first stage towards posing some hypotheses and possible demonstrations. Ideas on student retention could be tested more rigorously as a subsequent phase. The report uses lessons learned from the literature and experiences with programs across Canada to inform its consideration of what is being undertaken in British Columbia schools. In the absence of observed outcomes of programs, it is not possible at this stage to identify definitively which stay-in-school program components are most successful. However, it has been possible to look for dominant patterns. The analysis has involved identifying, assessing, and classifying the components common to programs pursuing similar implicit or explicit objectives, in line with theoretical perspectives on why students drop out of school. It thus relies on combining alignment with theory and experience elsewhere with evidence of consensus among programs in British Columbia schools to identify the program components and program structures most associated with intended outcomes.

The link to theory and practice elsewhere necessitates a review of perspectives on why students drop out of school. Following a brief consideration of the dropout problem as it affects British Columbia schools, the first part of this report concentrates on identifying perspectives on why students drop out of school, which inform stay-in-school programs. Canada-wide programs conforming to these perspectives are briefly reviewed.

The greater part of the report is concerned with lessons learned from fieldwork in the six British Columbia schools. What emerges first from the analysis is a typology of program structures, which emphasizes the link between a program's objectives and how closely it aligns and connects with mainstream schooling. A second categorization is how perspectives on why students drop out — implicit or explicit objectives of programs — align with program components. The mix of components in programs reflects the diversity of the student population. Programs and strategies vary to respond to different student needs. A consequence of this is that different objectives are being set for different groups.

This analysis is followed by a consideration of the definitions of success applied to stay-in-school programs. These are diverse, reflecting the differentiation in objectives for different students by program. These findings imply a need when developing programs for careful consideration of objectives for different student groups in deciding which program components to use and how to deliver them.

A short section considers issues surrounding the implementation and maintenance of programs, since the sustainability of programs — the continuity they can offer students — is linked to the support they have within and beyond schools. However, funding sources and funding requirements for future demonstrations under *Transitions* have not been addressed in this report.

The report ends with a view towards strategies for the development of future stay-in-school programs in terms of defining program objectives and identifying components that help meet these. It sets out options for developing future trials of stay-in-school interventions in British Columbia and discusses how such programs might be best implemented and evaluated.

1.2 BACKGROUND: THE NATURE OF THE DROPOUT PROBLEM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Transitions arises from concerns about the ability of British Columbia youth to realize their full potential in life. On one hand, there has been an increase in the relative returns to youth from completing high school. Considerable evidence has emerged during the 1990s that young Canadians' chances in many areas of their lives — for example, in achieving financial independence (Lemieux, Beaudry, & Parent, 1999) and in effective parenting (Cook & Willms, 1999) — are strongly related to their educational attainment. On the other hand, during the same period, around one in six students (16 per cent) in British Columbia have been failing to complete high school by age 20, and still one in eight (13 per cent) have not graduated by age 24 (Human Resources Development Canada, 1998).

While dropout rates for British Columbia are slightly below Canadian national levels (where 18 and 15 per cent have not graduated by age 20 and age 24 respectively), there are considerable local variations in student retention as well as across vulnerable groups. The category of students at risk of dropping out is heterogeneous and includes First Nations youth, immigrants, other ethnic minorities, teenage mothers, and children from low-income families as well as gay, lesbian, and male students. While there is, of course, considerable overlap among these different groups, this diversity suggests different sets of needs and possible solutions. Groups of particular interest to policy-makers for *Transitions* are teenage mothers, First Nations students, and students from low-income families. The dropout problem facing each group is discussed below.

Teenage mothers. Although there are few firm statistics, it is commonly reported that one of the main reasons why young women drop out of high school is the arrival of a baby. Across Canada in 1991, 64 per cent of women who left school by age 20 and who had not graduated by age 24 had dependent children compared with just 16 per cent of those who graduated by age 20 (Human Resources Development Canada, 1998). While this is evidence of association between childbirth and early school leaving, it should not be ruled out that pregnancy and marriage may be symptoms of, and attempts to deal with, disaffection from school (Upchurch & McCarthy, 1990). Dropping out by teenage mothers could be attributed to a combination of home circumstances, behavioural factors, the responsibilities of motherhood, and the difficulties of combining daycare with schooling. Schools have long sought solutions to these problems both through trying to reduce the incidence of adolescent pregnancies and through the provision of supports to student mothers.

First Nations students. There are 40,000 First Nations students in the British Columbia school system, equivalent to around six per cent of all students. The graduation rate among this group is low. A recent study by the British Columbia Ministry of Education tracking the 1991 cohort of Grade 8 intake to schools found only 32 per cent had graduated by the end of the study compared with 72 per cent of non-aboriginal students.

Until recently, the main emphasis for First Nations students was *access* to school rather than student retention. This has seen resources focused on building new schools within First Nations communities.[3] With improved access, attendance has increased dramatically, albeit

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[3]Most Canadian First Nations now have control over education programs in their communities (329 of the 363 on-reserve schools). In post-secondary education, the number of First Nations enrolments has more than tripled: an increase from 8,617 students in 1984/85 to 26,819 students in 1994/95. In 10 years the number of band-operated schools has more than

(continued)

from a low base. During the past 10 years the proportion of Aboriginal youth remaining in school in Canada until Grade 12 has more than doubled: from 31 per cent in 1984/85 to 73 per cent in 1994/95. However, an increasing proportion of First Nation students in British Columbia — close to three quarters by 1997 — attend school off-reserve. The focus for First Nations students in this study has thus been on programs targeted at off-reserve First Nations youth.

Students from low-income families. There is a strong association between being raised in a family in receipt of income assistance (IA) and failing to complete school. In turn, failing to graduate is linked to IA receipt later in life.

These associations were demonstrated recently in a paper by Green and Warburton (1998) using linked provincial education and income assistance data. Controlling for other factors, they found disproportionately high IA receipt at 19.5 and 24 years of age among individuals raised in IA households or of First Nations status.[4] This effect was mediated by graduation. For example, for women from IA households, graduation reduced their chances of IA receipt by 13 per cent.

Green and Warburton's (1998) research shows that the outcome of being a high school dropout worsens between ages 19.5 and 24. This appears to be because the relationship between graduation and IA receipt at age 19.5 is actually largely accounted for by earlier student ability, at Grade 11. It is not until later in life (24 years of age) that graduation itself becomes the more important influence on IA receipt. By age 24, earlier student ability in Grade 11 had become a weaker predictor of IA receipt than whether the person had failed a grade at school.

Across Green and Warburton's analyses, individuals from IA backgrounds gained considerably from staying in high school and benefited disproportionately from continuing to graduation. The authors concluded that "the main policy implication from these results is that there appears to be a substantial benefit to getting children from IA recipient households to go further in school" (1998, p. 22).

Following Green and Warburton, the focus of this report is on programs that help students to "go further in school." This focus on stay-in-school programs restricts the study to a quite narrow consideration of the much broader range of possible policy perspectives on leaving school before graduation. For example, it examines what can be done within schools to help individuals and groups who seem to fare particularly poorly in the education system, rather than on potentially influential factors outside the school, in wider society. The focus is more on what can be done to help students *achieve within the mainstream school model or on closely equivalent outcomes* than on changing institutional or organizational factors associated with the school system itself that may affect the entire school population.

There are many potential mechanisms at work influencing outcomes for students at risk of dropping out of school, which raises definitional issues for a short-term study such as this.

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doubled from 203 in 1984/85 to 412 in 1994/95. The percentage of Aboriginal youth in band-operated elementary and secondary schools has increased to over 54 per cent in 1994/95 from 20 per cent 10 years before. The federal government attributes recent improvements in student attendance and lowering of the dropout rate to the greater autonomy of First Nations education. More than 63 per cent of First Nations and Inuit elementary and secondary students receive some instruction in their own language (Government of Canada, 1999).

[4]The indicator used is whether or not the person is "Native."

For example, a longitudinal study could consider a range of long-term outcomes resulting from increasing the engagement of youths with education. The outcomes of interest could include raising graduation rates, reducing the chances that students drop behind and graduate after age 19, reducing the incidence of risk-taking behaviours, achieving progression in the labour market, improving parenting skills, or enhancing personal achievement or self-fulfillment. Similarly, while Green and Warburton's 1998 findings are indicative that one consequence of stay-in-school programs should be a lowering of future IA receipt, this is an inference that this study could not test directly.

Transitions was largely restricted to a consideration of schools' intentions for stay-in-school programs and how these were manifested in program design. Schools' intentions — the objectives of programs — might not have been directly or solely concerned with students' progress towards high school graduation. Objectives might include directing students along alternative paths that nonetheless lead to a productive or fulfilling adulthood. Programs with different objectives could still be helping to counter IA receipt in the long run. So the study includes some programs whose actions may generate retention in school as a by-product, rather than as an objective. In the final section, the implications of longer-term objectives other than retention in school are considered in potential strategies for future demonstrations.

1.3 REVIEW OF LESSONS LEARNED FROM PROGRAMS IN CANADA AND ELSEWHERE

The first stage of research work for *Transitions* was a review of current and recent Canadian programs aimed at dropout prevention. The review used literature, telephone interviews, and Internet searches and covered provinces and territories from across Canada. It provided examples of many innovative projects, the bulk of which were small scale, implemented independently, and not subject to formal or systematic evaluation. The programs are listed in Appendix A.

From this preliminary exploration of the national picture, it seems Canadian initiatives have been very localized, with the exception of the Human Resources Development Canada-backed National Stay-in-School initiative in the early 1990s. Even programs promoted at a provincial level — such as the Manitoba School Improvement Program — have few common elements among participating schools. So while there have been many innovative programs providing in-school assistance, out-of-school support, and alternative education to high-risk students in all parts of the country, it has proven difficult to identify successful common elements. In addition, few initiatives have been subject to formal or systematic evaluation.

The components of the reviewed stay-in-school programs are listed in Table 2. This is not an exhaustive list but provides evidence of the breadth of strategies adopted. Different approaches indicate different perspectives on why students drop out of school. The following section assesses these perspectives more formally and uses the reviewed programs and their components as examples of the perspectives in practice.

Table 2: Common Components in Canadian Stay-in-School Programs

Community-centred
School, community, and parents working together (public awareness, partnerships)
Out-of-school support (homework clubs)
Celebrity message endorsement
School-centred
Changing structure and content of school day (adopting new school ethos)
Increasing First Nations and/or general parental involvement in schools
Attendance rewards systems
Life skills/self responsibility assessment/counselling (including alcohol/drugs programs)
Networking among educators
Supported daycare
Alternative schools
Breakfast and lunch programs
Student-centred
Literacy upgrading
Mentoring (by peers, workplace, or adult-parent mentors)
Additional out-of-school training and work experience / community service
Life skills/self responsibility assessment/counselling (including alcohol/drugs programs)
Cultural (especially First Nations) activities
Recreational activities
Career planning/information
High school equivalency courses
Group sessions/support
Parenting courses

The identified Canadian initiatives provide only limited evidence of which components actually work to support dropout prevention. A review of the research literature in the early 1990s for the Canadian Education Association came to similar conclusions (Morris, Pawlovich, & McCall, 1991). The 12 "strategies seen as effective by researchers" (p. 89) were

1. increasing and improving parental involvement,

2. introducing quality kindergarten programs,[5]

3. providing comprehensive support for reading and mathematics,

4. mentoring programs,

5. individual instruction for at-risk students,

6. use of teachers as mentors,

7. work readiness programs,

8. tutoring programs,

9. alternative programs and flexible scheduling,

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[5]Programs targeted at preschool and elementary-school-age children were beyond the scope of *Transitions*. However, both the literature and fieldwork discussions with educators and support workers indicate that early years development is a very important influence on secondary-school outcomes. A longer-term perspective on student retention than adopted here would place greater emphasis on early years interventions.

10. school-based management / effective school programs

11. staff development programs, and

12. collaborative school-based community programs.

From more numerous and extensively evaluated youth programs in the United States, successful elements have included a focus on basic skills, employment, applied learning, incentives, and ongoing support and contact with caring adults. Tentatively, it appears Canadian observations overlap with evidence from the US. Certainly, reviews of what works aimed at a Canadian audience (e.g. Thompson, 1991) have largely been based on US evidence. The lack of firm evidence for Canada creates an opportunity for knowledge building through the *Transitions* study.

2. Literature Review of Perspectives on Why Students Drop Out of School

There are many perspectives on why students drop out of school, and a selection of immediately relevant theories will be reviewed here. For simplicity, "dropping out" of school is used in this report to refer to the process of leaving school before graduation. While alternative and potentially less pejorative phrases exist, they tend to be unwieldy. It should thus be emphasized that so-defined "dropping out" is not always a choice. The student may reject the institution or the institution may reject the student (Kelly, 1994). Students displaying inappropriate behaviours may disrupt their own schooling and that of their peers, encouraging the school to transfer them to another educational setting or even to expel them. A stay-in-school program should work to prevent rejection in either direction.

Perspectives often reflect how different professional groups traditionally view students' behaviour; for example, human services professionals on one hand and educators on the other (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). The two common perspectives can be seen as opposite ends of a continuum running from socio-psychological approaches (e.g. school membership, social bonding) through to academic-cognitive-attainment processes at the other (e.g. educational engagement, involvement in learning) (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). However, the interests of both groups of professionals will span the continuum. The factors influencing outcomes under these approaches include students' personal attributes and prevailing social and cultural conditions as well as their interaction with the education system.

These perspectives can be interpreted as implicit or explicit objectives for programs. Each theory suggests that by behaving in a particular way, schools can become more attractive to students. These perspectives or program objectives are considered in turn below. Each is followed by examples of Canadian (and some more rigorously evaluated US) stay-in-school programs associated with each objective. First, human services (socio-psychological) perspectives are reviewed, then educator (academic-cognitive-attainment) perspectives. Issues raised by resource constraints within schools are addressed. Finally, there is a consideration of what might limit students' abilities to draw on what schools offer: their attitudes, beliefs, confidence, and self-esteem.

2.1 HUMAN SERVICES PERSPECTIVES

The central tenet of the human services perspective is making school a more rewarding and welcoming environment.

2.1.1 Sense of Belonging

From the human services perspective, one important view is that students drop out of school when they feel they do not belong there. Sense of belonging concerns the relationship between the student and their educational environment. A brief discussion of the

psychological concepts underlying sense of belonging is worthwhile here, since they reoccur in many of the rationales underlying stay-in-school programs.

In any particular setting, students will have aspirations they want to achieve and responsibilities they have to fulfill. In other words, these are the expectations they have of themselves and the expectations others have of them. If there is positive feedback on their performance on both these fronts, this should result in a sense of belonging in a particular location, such as a school or class. Sense of belonging — the situation of being comfortable and familiar with the world in which one lives one's day-to-day life — has been tied to feelings of control over the environment by Seamon (1979). Environments that provide positive feedback to an individual's actions are commonly regarded as those over which they have some control.

Following from this perspective, it can be hypothesized that students drop out because they cannot adapt to their surroundings. Their behaviour is inappropriate and not reinforced by their peers, educators, or education system.

Individuals who find their behaviour lacking applicability to their surroundings get negative feedback and lack "control." This leads to helplessness and inability to act in a way that is meaningful to their surroundings: a potentially threatening or stressful situation to the individual. Examples here could include not being a fluent English-speaker in a school where this is the main means of communication, being accustomed to learning from one teacher when secondary school provides many different subject-specialist teachers, or even loss of a familiar physical and social environment. Students who behave inappropriately may feel they do not belong and voluntarily seek out more reinforcing environments outside of school.

An example of a program focused largely on sense of belonging is Partners for Youth, founded by a Fredericton businessman and former senator, Jim Ross. It works with young adults between the ages of 10 and 15 who meet one or more of the following criteria: not able to join other organized groups, having trouble finding a social group, having difficulty with relationships, having difficulty with participation and commitment, subject to peer pressure, unable to assume responsibility, and having difficulty in their school or home environment. Participants meet weekly during the school year with an intensive six-day camping experience each summer. Funding comes from corporate donors such as the Royal Bank Foundation.

2.1.2 Adjustment

The process of adaptation or adjustment to changes (such as moving to a new school) can be interpreted as bringing students' understanding of the world and how it relates to them (their frame of reference) into line with their new environment. New settings require changes in frame of reference and behaviour — adjustment or adaptation — to overcome the incongruence of the personal or social match between the student and the institution (Wehlage et al., 1989).

Experimenting with, learning, or copying more appropriate behaviour can result in positive feedback and reinforce the development of a new frame of reference. There is a sense in which high school education is itself intended to provide a controlled environment in which students adjust their frames of reference as they adapt to their new conceptualization of the world taught to them in the classroom. Students' adjustments following career

preparation or co-op placements in a hands-on work environment can often provide a dramatic example of how students quickly alter their frame of reference on the world.

Recent work with at-risk grades 10 to 12 students found students' ratings on sense of belonging, attitudes towards school, perceptions of school climate, and participation to be good predictors of staying in school versus dropping out (Lehr & Lange, 1999). Students at risk in alternate schools gave higher ratings than students at risk in the mainstream.

An example of a program focused largely on adjustment was the US *Project Transition*, designed to help ease the transition of students from the personalized structure of middle schools to the process-oriented structure of most high schools. In Grade 9, the first year of high school for most US students, Project Transition created student–teacher teams of about 120 students and 4 teachers. Components included a common prep for teachers, professional development, and student action plans that focused on rapid response to solving students' problems. The research evidence (Quint, Miller, Pastor, & Cytron, 1999) showed improvements on various measures of student engagement and credits earned.

2.1.3 Stigma

Stigma is a special kind of threat to sense of belonging. As a mark or sign of disapproval, of being shunned, or being rejected by others, it is a product of both labelling individuals as members of groups and of prevailing beliefs about the status of different groups. Membership in an ethnic group or displaying a low standing on socially desirable traits can often be stigmatizing.

Some individuals feel stigma by association. They do not want to behave in a particular way because they fear they would be associated with others who behave in that way and whom they look down on.

Stigma can manifest itself in schools by any form of categorization or division between students that creates groups, which can then be interpreted as having higher or lower status. Stigma can be diminished by avoiding the attachment of group labels or making them less distinct and public or — with more difficulty — by changing prevailing attitudes.

To tackle stigma often requires an alternative to remedial programs targeted at particular groups based on their individual characteristics. In 1997 the Government of Yukon Ministry of Education underwent a wholesale shift in its policies to change the K-12 infrastructure to encourage school attendance through an emphasis on inclusion. A specific aim was increasing the self-confidence of students. The approach is "multi-angled" with counselling services now made available to every student (instead of moving in only when a problem has been identified). All 400 or so Yukon teachers have been trained in imparting social skills. The approach is holistic, based on the premise that prevention requires action at the appropriate time for everyone. There is no separate First Nations component and no formal evaluation.

2.1.4 Exclusion by Scheduling

A different view, still arising from a human services perspective, is that some students fall out of the school system not because of any difficulties with the environment or the education process, but because of the practical issue of scheduling among their other priorities. This issue can arise for students who work, who are ill, or who care for relatives or small children. They may wish to continue with school but find its schedules conflict with

their other responsibilities. Other students may find it difficult to commit to the concentration of activity that occurs within the conventional school day or to long lessons. The argument here is for schools to be more flexible in their timetabling in terms of hours, days, and parts of the year in which they offer services.

In 1993/94, Lockeport Regional High School in rural Nova Scotia developed a "climate building model" that comprised 15 elements. These included radical timetable changes (introduction of semestering with unstructured teacher planning and student interaction time), rewards systems, invitational learning, an innovative attendance policy (tied in to exam exemptions), and peer mentoring. It shared the model with six other formal partner schools whose dropout rates dropped while student and staff attendance increased.

2.1.5 Connection Between Life In and Out of School

It may be that for some students their ability to learn and adapt is compromised by their home circumstances. They find little connection between their role in school and the lives they lead in their local communities, at home on their own or with parents/carers, and among their peer group. Attending school simply does not fit with what is expected of them at home or on the street.

For most youths the key influence will be parents. Family beliefs and attitudes are typically "firmly embedded" in the minds of children (Coleman, 1999). If parents support school activities and act as advocates of school attendance, then this can be expected to act as a positive influence on students' attendance. Parents can simultaneously become co-teachers and co-learners, helping to embed the learning experience in their children's lives. Indeed, parents may be better able than students to articulate some dimensions of students' needs to schools, so taking on board parents' wishes may enhance the schools relevance to students, particularly those from typically disadvantaged or stigmatized groups.

While it would appear that the development of an interactive relationship with parents can aid student retention, there may be difficulties on the part of some parents in terms of willingness or availability to become involved in school or on the part of students for their parents to become involved.

A school is limited in its ability to alter other influences on the student from their surrounding neighbourhood or peers. It may be best focused on making schooling appropriate to students in these situations, teaching them how to cope and avoid becoming involved in risky behaviours and helping to find alternative connections within community or peer groups that reinforce the relevance of school.

An example from Laval is the Curé-Antoine-Labelle Secondary School-based program that offers support and assistance to students aged 13 to 16 who lack an interest in learning and are struggling with long-term, chronic problems in their lives. A team of supportive adults (including a special education teacher, psychologist, and associate director) is brought together to address the multiple personal and social development needs of the students. The academic part of the program is customized to each student's needs and abilities. A physical education and technical skills development program are also offered. The goals of the program are to teach young people self-responsibility and to create supportive relationships between themselves and adult helpers. Staff meet with parents at the beginning of the

program and encourage them to be involved throughout. Every effort is made to keep the learning environment positive and relevant to the needs of students.

The US *Quantum Opportunity Program* (QOP) used community-based case managers to work with students from families in receipt of welfare benefits, beginning in Grade 8 and continuing through high school. Case managers helped engage students in productive after-school activities including tutorial support, community service, paid jobs, and extracurricular activities. There were also financial incentives (see 2.3.1): students received financial stipends for participation in after-school activities and larger stipends for meeting certain benchmarks. The evaluation (Hahn, Leavitt, & Aaron, 1994) showed that QOP has had a positive impact on school completion, pregnancy prevention, post-secondary enrolment, and welfare avoidance.

2.1.6 Ancillary Supports

Demanding home lives can also discourage attendance or distract from the learning process. Students from low-income families may not have the choice of coming to school if they cannot afford the bus fare or must choose between attending school and purchasing food. Instrumental supports may be required as an integral part of the school program, such as the provision of meals and bus tickets. Such initiatives follow what Le Compte (1996) has called the *culture of poverty* approach, whereby schools attempt to compensate for home circumstances.

Two groups of students illustrate how the human services perspective on dropping out of school can be interpreted and influence the design of stay-in-school programs (see Box 1a and Box 1b).

Box 1a: Student Groups Especially Vulnerable to Dropping Out of School — Teenage Mothers

Pregnancy disrupts schooling. Students must be away from the school for the birth and often have to obtain daycare to continue schooling. The often-unexpected advent of motherhood and the new demands it places on teenage parents' limited resources can mean time with the family is prioritized over time at school. Students are likely to fall behind in their classes. Schools can help in a number of ways that might allow students to spend longer in school. Life skills, self-responsibility, and family-planning courses can help students in the decisions they make around relationships and action to prevent starting a family. Once pregnant, students can receive parenting classes and health worker support to help prepare them for the tasks ahead, including how schooling and parenting might be combined. Once the baby is born, parenting courses and health worker support could continue to help draw student mothers back into school and hopefully to other classes also.

If most teenage mothers are to attend school, they will need daycare for their children. Supports can range from advice and direction toward suitable placements to actual provision of places on or close to school grounds. Having children close to hand can minimize disruption if problems arise in daycare. Use of such daycare can be made contingent upon students attending school. Daycare provision is often associated with a mini-school for teenage mothers. A themed mini-school of this type can reduce the stigma these students might feel rejoining mainstream classes. This may represent an efficient environment in which to deliver parent-specific supports. The unifying feature of recent motherhood may lead to strong social bonding among students within the mini-school, further encouraging attendance.

**Box 1b: Student Groups Especially Vulnerable to Dropping
Out of School — First Nations Students**

The special case of First Nations students can also be used to illustrate the human services perspectives on sense of belonging. In Canada — a "settler" society where the dominant culture was imported from abroad — it may be particularly difficult for descendants of the original inhabitants to accept the principles, ethos, and cultural standpoint of what has become mainstream education. Mainstream education may be Eurocentric in climate, culture, and pedagogic practices. Whatever the merits of accommodating to the dominant structures of the school system as preparation for living in the dominant culture, there remains a perception that to do so might threaten the perpetuation of First Nations' own culture and self-identity.* In this sense, it may be more difficult to connect First Nations students to the education process if it aspires to an all-encompassing culture that they feel has little relevance to their own. In addition, First Nations students, along with other ethnic minorities may experience racism or prejudice when in school.

A typical program adds a cultural perspective to teaching groups of First Nations students, often in a mini-school setting. This may aid comprehension of course material, while at the same time providing a sense of cultural identity at the school. The disadvantages are the potentially high cost of such separate teaching and the stigma that may become attached to such segregation within schools.

Ogbu and Simons (1998) suggest a further shift in emphasis in schools' missions to preserve the distinctiveness of separate cultures. They feel schools should move away from a curricular focus that might alter students' cultural identity (e.g. through requiring language conformity). For minorities to be successful without assimilation, they argue that schools should focus on the transmission of skills and credentials, not the changing of students' language and culture.

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*This latter argument applies to descendants of immigrants too. However, to the extent that immigration was voluntary and migrants selected the dominant culture they joined, there may be greater willingness to adapt to the mainstream. Both groups may face difficulties in the sense of belonging they experience in mainstream schools. But, by virtue of their relationship with the prevailing cultural group, the two types of minority can be expected to differ in the extent to which they have chosen and thus respect the dominant culture and in the extent to which they accept its norms and expectations.

2.2 EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES

The above human services perspectives associate sense of belonging, adaptation, and stigma with students' social and emotional needs. An alternative educators' perspective is that students need an appropriate level of intellectual stimulation and challenge to become engaged in their education. Schools are successful if they connect students to the education process.

Three major impediments to educational engagement were identified by Wehlage et al. (1989) as negative influences on students' attachment to school. These were educators' emphasis on covering subject matter, dominance of a narrow learning process, and lack of a clear relationship between achievement and an explicit or valued goal. Each of these three is considered in turn below.

2.2.1 Pace of Schooling and Teaching Methods

Students need to follow the curriculum at a comfortable pace to be able to learn in consecutive, incremental steps. A comfortable pace suggests an optimum level of progression through courses: to keep up with the curriculum, but not to be held back by it. At the same

time, teaching methods need to be appropriate and able to accommodate different learning styles. To learn, students must engage and learning must be incremental. While some students may be stimulated by information delivered in the abstract, others may respond to more experiential or individualized techniques.

2.2.2 Breadth of Learning Process

The need to widen the learning process can imply that some students require alternative routes to achieve the same goals. This may require different teaching methods. Another interpretation is that students should be able to pursue legitimate, but alternative, goals. Different teaching methods and different expectations of students may be required. Such different expectations need not be lower.

Glidden (1999) places raising expectations of students among the factors that have helped Wichita public schools achieve high socio-economic outcomes from a low-income student intake. The overarching perspective on the learning process is that there is not one universal educational process that suits all and that some students require different expectations if they are to become responsible for their learning.

2.2.3 Connecting Students to Education Goals

This area of educational engagement suggests schooling should be relevant to students' current and foreseeable future lives. If students face particular immediate or imminent problems, then education that prepares them for such challenges will be more highly valued. If students cannot see the relevance of what they learn, they are more likely to disengage from their own education.

The majority of the Canadian experiences reviewed included components focused on educational engagement. An example for First Nations students is the Plains Indians Cultural Survival School, serving the Calgary First Nations community since 1979. The school is committed to creating a learning framework that seeks a balance between culture and education. This involves cultivating and endorsing a constructive, participatory learning environment grounded in a stable lifestyle for students. The school undertakes to design, link, and unite Native culture, history, and language with innovative academic, social, and community programs in a supportive school setting. Courses are multi-disciplinary and cross-curricular. The school develops and encourages personal decision making and life skills, enabling students to achieve personal and career goals and to upgrade their education, leading to broader career opportunities through direct entry into the workplace or continuation to post-secondary education (Calgary Board of Education, 1998).

Career Academies in the US provide an example of schools-within-schools organized around a career theme. Each academy has between 150 to 200 students (about 50 in each grade level from Grade 9 to Grade 12) and a dedicated group of teachers who stay with the same students throughout their high school experience. Career Academies attract a broad cross-section of students including high performers and low performers. Students take four of their core classes within the academy (usually English, Math, Science, and a career class) and the remaining classes (Social Studies, foreign language, Physical Education, Music, and/or Art) in the mainstream school. There is a focus on providing both core academic skills and interdisciplinary classes organized around the career theme. Students receive high-quality work-based learning experiences with area employers starting in the summer following

Grade 11 and continuing part time during Grade 12. Academy teachers usually have common prep where they can plan lessons together and discuss individual student problems. Career Academies have a 25-year history, and there are now over 1,000 in the United States. They were originally created as dropout prevention intervention, but now there is as much emphasis on preparation for college as there is on successfully completing high school. There is evidence from a recent evaluation of Career Academies (Kemple, Poglinco, & Snipes, 1999) that Career Academies

1. created a more supportive learning environment for students and teachers,

2. increased employment and work-based learning opportunities for students during high school, and

3. reduced dropout rates for the subgroup of students with risk factors associated with dropping out, although there were no impacts on academic achievement.

2.3 OTHER PERSPECTIVES

2.3.1 Incentives

There will be a limit to how far the school can make itself or its education program inherently attractive to students. Students who attend, work hard, and achieve but who do not find these efforts inherently rewarding may need their behaviour reinforced with more tangible rewards. Reinforcement can range from verbal commendations and public recognition to gifts and other financial incentives. In a similar vein, non-attendance may be penalized in some way. Rewards for desirable behaviour may be found as cost-effective a way to keep students in school as making that behaviour inherently rewarding.

The thesis underlying incentives is that students will be more likely to attend if there is some additional incentive to do so, such as a free gift or bus fare. While there is a risk that such systems downgrade or trivialize the acts they intend to encourage, they may nonetheless act as an initial trigger to attend for a reluctant student. As a consequence of responding to the incentive, the student may learn the educational and social benefits inherent in regular attendance (benefits they would not have known about if the rewards system had not encouraged them to stay in the first place). A similar system can be used to endorse other favoured behaviours, such as helping fellow students.

2.3.2 Students' Personal Barriers

So far there has been little discussion in the human services or educator perspectives of the role of students' attitudes or beliefs towards school or the role of their own confidence and self-esteem in decisions about staying in school. Schooling is a two-way interaction, and students who are unwilling or unable to communicate will not benefit fully from mainstream education or from whatever special programming is in place. So students may drop out of school because they will not or cannot connect with school.

Attitudes and beliefs are influenced over a long period by students' home environments and can be difficult to change once students reach the teenage years. Again, school links to home may be influential. However, for older children and those with disrupted home lives, the focus may need to be more directly on students themselves. Schools need to demonstrate

to students the value of schooling to their future if they are to attempt to combat any negative attitudes they may have towards school. This is an area where messages conveyed by other influences on students — media and community — might be important.

To restore the confidence and self-esteem of lower-ability students, there may need to be an emphasis on students' capabilities rather than what they are not capable of. However, reducing the intellectual challenge of course material in order to minimize the impact of failures on self-esteem can be a risky strategy if it devalues the course in students' eyes (Le Compte, 1996).

For students who have fallen behind and feel neglected by the education system, personal attention and support through contact and reinforcement from a caring adult within the system may aid the rebuilding of confidence and self-esteem. Such attention may be offered in alternative schooling environments and can represent an opportunity for students to demonstrate relative achievements and build self-confidence. But in segregating students from the mainstream, alternative schools can also inadvertently attach labels to students as "incapable" that can stigmatize and damage self-esteem.

Changing the way students approach schooling can prove a more difficult task than changing the way the school is presented to students. It is something over which schools can have little control unless students attend.

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

While both human services and educator perspectives talk largely in terms of how schools should change to accommodate students, it is the interaction and relationship between schools and students that is the ultimate goal of change and to which the above theories relate. In terms of factors over which a school can exercise some control, students drop out of school because their behaviour in attending or while attending is not reinforced. In sum, this can be because

1. they feel they do not belong,

2. they find it difficult to adjust to new surroundings,

3. they find themselves stigmatized,

4. they feel excluded by scheduling,

5. there is little connection between their lives in and out of school,

6. they are excluded by their material circumstances,

7. they are not educationally engaged (they feel left behind by or under-stimulated by the pace of learning, their learning style does not conform to the prevalent teaching process, they cannot connect with educational goals), and

8. they need more explicit rewards than those implicit in attending school and the learning process.

These different perspectives on why students drop out of school indicate ways schools can respond to encourage attendance. They represent implicit or explicit objectives for programs (increasing sense of belonging, reducing stigma, enhancing adjustment, and so on).

It is likely that programs will respond to more than one theory. However, it will be difficult for programs to tackle all areas simultaneously. Not all the theories are mutually compatible and resources will limit program scope still further. For example, targeting services at the at-risk group most in need may seem efficient, but this targeting may be counterproductive if it stigmatizes receipt of services. While providing programs to broader groups of students may reduce stigma, it also risks providing inappropriate programs for those not in need, and thus disengaging other students.

Later sections will demonstrate how stay-in-school programs in British Columbia schools have been informed by one or more of the above theories.

3. School Responses to the Dropout Problem in British Columbia: Programs In Practice

3.1 TYPOLOGY OF DIFFERENT PROGRAMS BY PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The *Transistions* study set out to identify a variety of programs already operated by schools in British Columbia that may encourage students to stay on in school. These were to be programs developed locally, in response to perceived students' needs in the schools concerned. Through a process of identifying what educational and human service components programs comprised and how these were delivered, it was hoped that the study could learn how programs aim to deliver on their explicit or implicit objectives.

The three groups of students of particular interest to this study were First Nations students, teenage mothers, and students from low-income families. Schools were selected with these groups in mind, with the intention of creating a geographical spread across the province. The low-income definition used was income assistance (IA) receipt. Research with British Columbia data has suggested that staying on in school is of greatest benefit to those raised in households in receipt of IA (Green & Warburton, 1998). In line with these findings, schools were selected with catchment areas that contained a high proportion of families in receipt of income assistance,[1] and with sizeable First Nations populations.

The research process is detailed in Appendix B. Visits were made to 24 programs associated with six British Columbia secondary schools.[2] Programs were identified through discussions with principals and liaisons as those that helped students to stay on in school. Grades served ranged from 8 to 12. Care was taken to include programs for First Nations students (Tumanos at Vancouver Technical, Outreach and Aries at Britannia, and Four Directions Storefront at Norkam) and teenage mothers (TMAP at Prince George, Growing Together at Guildford Park, and Young Parents at Carihi). Schools often ran more programs than those selected here, and the exclusion of any particular program is no reflection on its efficacy.

The programs are described in detail in Appendix C. They varied on a number of dimensions besides population served. One of the most obvious was the relationship of the program to the mainstream school — the structure of the program (see Table 3).

Four program structure categories were developed, although some programs fell between categories. The first two were mainstream programs within the school that happen to serve a high proportion of students at risk, including peer and adult mentoring and vocational courses, and focused educational enhancements including extra tutoring and drop-in skills centres. The third and fourth categories involved programs where students attended classes separated from the mainstream school, usually in their own designated classroom with

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[1]All six schools were in the upper quartile on this dimension.
[2]One further program (Total Ed) is an independent alternate school for senior grades.

dedicated staff. These programs are sometimes referred to as mini-schools. They can be located within the mainstream school (where the model has been termed a "school within a school") or outside of it. The four categories form the column headings in Table 3.[3]

Table 3: Typology of Program Delivery

| School | Method of Program Delivery | | | |
	Mainstream School	**Educational Enhancements**	**In-School Alternate Program**	**Out-of-School Alternate Program**
Norkam Secondary School	Peer Helpers		Work Study	Four Directions Storefront
Carihi Secondary School	Leadership Program	Literacy Program	Community Service Co-op Young Parents Flex	
Prince George Secondary School			Skill Support	TAPS TMAP
Guildford Park Secondary School			Alternate Program Growing Together Transitions Co-op	
Britannia Community Secondary School	Mentoring (Britannia Project)		8J9J	Aries Outreach
Vancouver Technical Secondary School	Career Prep		Nova Tumanos	Spectrum Sunrise
Total Education				Total Education

The program structure described in Table 3 largely determines the degree to which at-risk students were segregated from other students and from the school as an institution or integrated among them. The program structure categories change more or less in a continuum from highly integrated on the left-hand side of the table to highly segregated on the right-hand side.

3.1.1 Mainstream School Programs

Most often, the mainstream programs with which at-risk students came into contact involved mentoring either by fellow students (Peer Helpers, Leadership Program) or by adults from outside the school (Mentoring at Britannia).[4] The Peer Helpers program at

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[3]The absence of a program in a particular category does not imply that such a program was absent from the school, merely that it was not included in *Transitions* fieldwork.

[4]There are key differences between adult and student mentors and the way in which they help students to connect with school. Both types of mentor are a means of compensating for the hierarchical nature of high school as an institution, with unequal power relations between principal, teachers, and counsellors on one side and students on the other. On occasion, students in need of guidance or support may find it difficult to approach those who exert some control over their destiny within the school. Having a student mentor who can offer initial support from a similar perspective may prove invaluable. Although student peers will require some training, this is a relatively low-cost way to offer additional support to at-risk students. In addition to helping students connect with mainstream school, student mentors should aid the development of students' sense of belonging in the school.

Mentoring by adults deals much more closely with the relevance of education. Some students may need assistance in linking the demands placed upon them by school with their longer-term life chances. Students may want to discuss school-related issues — perhaps about performance or issues of a personal nature — or an issue which transcends school boundaries — such as their longer term future outside school and the implications of staying in school or dropping out — with a non-school member. For both these problems, an adult mentor may be appropriate. Outsider adults combine a perspective on life beyond school with no direct vested interest in the school's business. They also do not fit within the

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Norkam is described in Box 2. The Career Prep program at Vancouver Technical Secondary School also falls within this category since it engages a high proportion of the Grade 11 and Grade 12 school population, including many students at risk, alongside high-ability students.

Box 2: Norkam Secondary School — Peer Counselling / Peer Mediation

Peer counselling at Norkam Secondary School is a program to connect senior students with incoming Grade 8 students in order to ease their transition into secondary school. Two counsellors and the drama teacher supervise about 40 hand-selected Peer Helpers from the senior grades. These helpers first spend time training in communication, conflict resolution, and group dynamics. They then meet Grade 8 students in their home rooms on alternate weeks for 20 minutes to organize presentations on subjects that they think would be helpful to the new students. Peer mediators are a subset of the peer counsellors who receive extra training to mediate in conflicts between students.

3.1.2 Educational Enhancements

There were several examples of programs that provided additional support to at-risk students in a targeted way. Students left mainstream classes for short periods to receive additional educational supports at skills centres that focused on upgrading in Math or Reading or other subjects. The Literacy Program at Carihi was the only one of these studied in detail (see Box 3). Schools varied in the extent to which counsellors focused on advising students at risk.

The Alternate Program at Guildford Park was an alternate program that nonetheless offered services to "drop in" students on a temporary basis. Skill Support at Prince George is a half-day alternate program during which students are out of their regular grade, focused on English and Math skills.

Box 3: Carihi Secondary School — Literacy Program

This educational enhancement was designed, and is delivered, by one teacher at Carihi Secondary School to address the problem of students who are having problems reading. The students in this program are behind their grade in reading. Through lack of exposure, they may have limited vocabulary or have failed to exercise or master decoding skills. The teacher works individually, in 25-minute sessions, with around 12 students who choose to be in the program. Almost all are male. Sessions are spent reading with students around subjects of interest to them and skills are taught using a whole language approach rather than a remedial model of instruction.

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power relations of the school hierarchy. Students may come to trust their advice as impartial. To the extent that mentors advise students on the value of education and advise them on courses of action that may help overcome problems the student has affecting attendance at school, adult mentors can encourage staying on in school. Compared with peer mentors, adult mentor programs typically cost more to implement and coordinate.

3.1.3 In-School Alternate Programs

The most frequently visited program type was the in-school alternate program. Students at risk of dropping out either selected or were referred to these programs, often on the advice of a counsellor or teacher. Alternate programs of this type are often referred to as a "safety net" for at-risk students.[5]

Students take classes in an alternative setting, usually one or more designated classrooms with their own dedicated staff of teachers and youth/family support workers. Often these schools operate at different hours of the day (e.g. Nova at Vancouver Technical, see Box 4) or days of the week (e.g. Flex at Carihi) that are better to meet student needs. The segregated alternative setting of alternate programs offered the opportunity to serve specific groups with more appropriate education and services, such as teenage mothers (e.g. Young Parents, Growing Together, see Box 5) or First Nations students (e.g. Tumanos).

Box 4: Vancouver Technical Secondary School — Nova

This program started as an initiative of Vancouver Technical Secondary School to help students in grades 8 and 9 who were at risk of dropping out of school. It later incorporated higher grades. It is staffed by two teachers, two youth and family workers, and an alternate program worker who serve 50 students. It is a half-day program, which makes it attractive for students who are losing interest in school or who cannot make it to school for the full day. They work only on core academics with four staff in small class groups. Subjects are delivered using a flexible approach with an aim for students to complete Grade 12 or to complete Grade 10 and then go on to vocational training. The setting is more informal than the traditional classroom. Field trips are a feature of the program to encourage team building and engage students in their subjects. They are offered lunch and a snack at their break and are also given bus tickets.

Box 5: Guildford Park Secondary School — Growing Together

Growing Together is an education and daycare program, located at Guildford Park Secondary School, developed in response to inadequate services for adolescent mothers and their children. It can register between 35 and 40 pregnant and parenting students under 20 years of age, in grades 8 to 12. They must secure a daycare place before they are admitted. Growing Together is staffed by three teachers and one counsellor who provide a structured and academic program. The program leads to graduation and requires students to complete a minimum of two courses per semester. Students must attend at least 80 per cent of the time including validated excusable absences. A full-time counsellor and compulsory customized courses help students deal with the difficulties of balancing the responsibilities of motherhood with school work.

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[5]From a number of interviews and from the literature (Kelly, 1996), it is clear that the availability of alternate schools can also serve a "safety-valve" purpose which influences the schooling of students in both the mainstream and alternate schools. In the mainstream school, a minority of students whose behaviour is disruptive can interfere with the learning of their peers, and ultimately threaten the educational achievement of the majority. The school can thus use an alternate

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Two alternate programs at Vancouver Technical Secondary School were located in their own buildings close to the school grounds, but took students from a wider catchment than the school itself (termed "district programs"). Spectrum and Sunrise are thus classified midway between in-school and out-of-school programs. This intermediate position was also occupied by the Transitions co-op at Guildford Park that involved classes both on and off the school site.

3.1.4 Out-of-School Alternate Programs

Schools organized alternate programs off the school grounds, usually in collaboration with outside partners. Prince George ran two such programs: one for teenage mothers (TMAP) in collaboration with the Elizabeth Fry Society and one for students aged 17 and over who had not been successful at high school (TAPS, see Box 6). Outreach, a program for First Nations students was administered by Britannia (see Box 7).

**Box 6: Prince George Secondary School —
Transitional Alternate Programs (TAPS)**

This option is administered by Prince George Secondary School and located on the local community college campus. It currently serves 72 students and has 6 staff members. It is designed for students aged 17 and over who have not been successful in traditional (or even alternate) schools and who are able to work at a minimum Grade 10 level. In general, this program puts students on a graduation track. Classes are delivered over the course of the day in two-hour time slots and students are expected to attend a minimum of two hours every weekday. Most subjects are self-directed, although some in the senior curriculum may be teacher-directed. TAPS also offers two to four weeks of work experience or apprenticeship placements. The expectation at TAPS is that students should be treated like, and behave as, adults. It offers a food program and youth workers are available all day to provide support for personal problems.

A few alternate programs exist entirely independently of schools such as Total Education, which is situated in the Vancouver Eastside. Aside from Total Education, these programs were not included in this study.

Box 7: Britannia Community Secondary School — Outreach

Outreach is an off-site alternative for First Nations students administered by Britannia Community Secondary School. It is a cultural, academic, and social program for students who have disconnected in some way from the mainstream. About 40 students in grades 8 to 11 are registered in the program, supported by six staff. Core curriculum subjects and electives are studied individually and are self-paced. The philosophy of the program is presented in four "R"s: Respect, Responsibility, Rights, and Recognition. These are intended to make Outreach a safe environment for learning and personal growth. Outdoor education is used to connect students to their culture and subjects. Meals and bus fare are provided for students while they are in school.

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program for disruptive students as a safety valve for the mainstream school and the threat of placement on an alternate program may be used as a deterrent against being disruptive.

3.2 PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The 24 programs were also analyzed to identify the key educational and human services elements ("components") they comprised. Each of these components related in some way to underlying beliefs about why students drop out of school and what appropriate remedies might be. Table 4 presents these components and their frequency among the visited programs.

Table 4: Program Components and Frequency

Related Theoretical Perspective	Program Component	n
Sense of belonging	Respect for students	24
	Access to a caring adult	21
	Emphasis on safe environment	19
	Environment among peers	15
	Connecting students with their peer group	15
	Student "ownership" of space	14
	Participation in group activities	7
	Involved outdoor education	4
	Student mentors	3
Adjustment	Low staffing ratios	21
	Expectations of students' attendance	16
	Maintained connection to mainstream school	14
	Maintained continuity in transition as students exit program	10
Reduce stigma	Allowed voluntary entry	24
	No mandated entry into program	23
	No lower-bound selection criteria into program	12
Scheduling	Flexibility in hours, relative to mainstream	18
	No wait list to enter program	10
	Flexibility in days of week, relative to mainstream school	6
	Flexibility in operation over calendar year, relative to mainstream school	2
Home connection	Involved partners outside school	10
	Involved connection with student's home	8
	Expectations of parents	6
	Community involvement	2
Ancillary supports	Meals — breakfast or lunch provided	9
	Transportation — provided bus tickets/passes or taxis	5
Educational	Expectations of teachers different from mainstream	20
	Teaching style: emphasis on connecting students to education	19
	Flexibility in methods of instruction	18
	Flexibility in course choice	17
	Self-paced learning	16
	Expectations of students' academic performance	12
	Involved connection to world of work	9
Incentives	Incentives for behaviour other than attendance/time-keeping	13
	Penalty for non-attendance or lateness	8
	Incentives for attendance	6
Maximum frequency		**24**

The frequencies total the occurrence of components across all 24 programs, such that the maximum frequency would be 24. The existence of a component is no indication of the intensity with which it was applied, and frequent occurrence is no indication of the quality of the intervention. In the analysis that follows, high frequency has been interpreted as indicative of consensus among programs in the value of particular components.

In Table 4, the components have been divided into eight dimensions, corresponding to the eight perspectives on why students drop out of school in Section 2.4. This section thus explores the relationship between these perspectives (the implicit and explicit objectives of programs) and the related program components. The aim is to identify the components most closely identified with achieving different outcomes or outcomes for different groups.

To undertake this analysis, the array of components associated with each program was compared and cross-tabulated to identify links between components (grouped in the eight dimensions above) and types of program. Programs were grouped in two ways: (1) to include the four program structures (and two intermediate categories) delineated in the columns of Table 3 and (2) by groups of students served (First Nations students and teenage mothers).

Of course, programs were rarely linked to achievement of a single objective. Most commonly, they had adopted components influenced by a number of different perspectives (from Section 2) about what keeps students attached to school. In the following analysis, it should be remembered that while each program was unique, each shared a considerable overlap with others in terms of what it was trying to achieve. No one program stood out as pursuing a perspective at variance to the others.

The absence of stark differences between programs (and data on student outcomes) reduces the means for comparing programs. However, the absence of sharp distinctions is advantageous here in that it is indicative of a commonality of purpose and a general agreement on the components that help achieve objectives. The extent of consensus can be taken as some sign of endorsement of the appropriateness of the strategies pursued.

However, while not formally measured, there was evidence from fieldwork of variation in the intensity and efficiency with which individual components of programs were delivered. It may be that the achievement of objectives is more closely related to these unmeasured dimensions of variation between programs than in the observed differences in components. If so, then the strategies required for achieving particular outcomes (translated as a combination of program components) are less in doubt than the efficacy of programs in their delivery. Data on student outcomes would be needed to test this hypothesis.

Each of the objectives is considered in turn and presented with evidence of the components and program structures that aim to help achieve it. The section ends with a summary of the strategies pursued by each type of program (each method of program delivery and programs for specific groups).

3.2.1 Sense of Belonging

Generally, the more distant the program from the mainstream school, the stronger its focus on components emphasizing sense of belonging. Enhancing students' sense of belonging appeared to be one of the key objectives of the school-within-a-school alternate program model. These programs created an environment in which students felt more at home. They did this by emphasizing components such as a safe environment, placing

students among peers, student "ownership" of space, participation in group activities, and access to a caring adult. Out-of-school alternate programs emphasized the same elements, but to a lesser degree, while all programs for First Nations students emphasized these components.

Components that aimed to generate a sense of belonging for students in school were the most common features across programs. All programs fostered sense of belonging to some degree by emphasizing respect for students' needs.

The next most prevalent component was access to a caring adult. Students emphasized the importance of having one or more accessible individuals whom they could trust and turn to for advice and support. Nearly all programs featured such relationships, and those that did not were offering student mentors.

Bringing student peers together, either informally or formally with mentors, aids socialization and helps students develop a sense of belonging among their new classmates.

Given the backgrounds of students and hostility they might experience on the street or at home, it was important that more than three quarters of programs offered a relatively "safe" environment for those who attended. In the programs visited, students usually had some "ownership" of the space. Evidence of ownership visible during visits included student art on the walls and freedom to decorate their own desks.

3.2.2 Adjustment

In fieldwork, students' adjustment was found to be the focus of particularly the more transitional programs, those that represented an overlap between in-school alternate programs and mainstream educational enhancements, those with a strong vocational component, and the out-of-school alternate programs that looked to providing a learning environment independent of the schools'.

Typically, there were fewer students per teacher ("lower staffing ratios") in programs than in the mainstream school, and there were fewer changes in teaching staff during the school day. For Grade 8 students, having longer contact with such staff would be likely to replicate their situation in elementary school more closely and ease adjustment to secondary school. For all students, some of the additional staff were youth/family workers who focus on the social, emotional, and behavioural well-being of students. More staff means more opportunities to understand the difficulties each individual encounters in school and suggest adjustment strategies.

The expectation of attendance many programs emphasized would represent a new environment for many students. For any other impacts of programs to be felt, students would have to attend. Thus, like the mainstream school, programs also required adjustment on the part of students. To attend the programs they had to come to terms with being in school. But this adjustment was hopefully taking place in a context where other needs were being met.

Most programs were geared to connecting students with the mainstream school. They did this through three mechanisms: by already being part of the mainstream (like mentoring programs), by releasing students to pursue options (electives or other courses) in mainstream classes, or by having students' return to the mainstream school as one of the program

objectives. Just under half the programs appeared to place an emphasis on coordination with students' potential destinations on leaving the program.

A somewhat broader issue was connection between programs. Some schools ran programs that targeted very closely overlapping student groups. At the same time, some programs might not run the full duration of a high school career; for example, ending at Grade 10. To the extent that duplication and enforced transitions follow a school-wide strategy for student support, they may be beneficial in offering greater choice and flexibility to students. To the extent that anomalies reflected funding constraints, there may be less student benefit.

Overall, components associated with adjustment were fairly evenly distributed between programs.

3.2.3 Reduction of Stigma

Students find themselves treated differently by teachers, counsellors, or other students according to the label they carry. Allocation to a program may be one such label. Programs that focus on reducing stigma either try to avoid attaching labels or remove students from environments where the label carries meaning.

The debate here is over stigmatization versus efficiency in program structure. Providing intensive help to all students may remove any stigma attached to receipt of that help but may prove to be an expensive use of resources when only a minority is in need of support. The provision of inappropriate programs could disengage some students and run counter to the intention of encouraging students to stay in school.

A potentially more efficient alternative to universal support is to provide specialist help only to those students identified as in need. Such students may self-identify or be prompted by their counsellor or teacher. Placing a requirement on all students to receive individually tailored support could reduce the stigma associated with being one of the minority receiving counselling, yet this runs counter to efficiency.

Programs tended to work hard to prevent students feeling stigmatized, but mechanisms varied. One out-of-school program emphasized its physical distance from the mainstream school. Another in-school program emphasized the free choice students had in attending. Minimizing compulsion should reduce the stigma of programs. All programs allowed voluntary entry and only one had students who were mandated to attend.

The most common program structure involved identifying groups in need of support and targeting efforts at these people collectively. Separate alternative/mini-schools provide an environment in which students carry similar labels and have an independent system of teachers and support staff. This may be more efficient and may be less stigmatizing than individual contacts, but risks stigmatizing a whole group, depending on the selection criteria adopted. So the efficiency of the process is dependent on the appropriateness of the selection criteria.[6]

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[6]For example, First Nations students may be perceived as an at-risk group, but not all students will be in need of additional support. Running a special program for First Nations students has the advantage of bringing together students who share a common culture. However, it risks stigmatizing First Nations status within the school and providing services to some who do not need them while not providing them to some who do. More sophisticated selection criteria (for example, combining

(continued)

Some programs found they needed to screen their intake for academic ability to cope with the program curriculum. For example, a Grade 8 alternate program might accept only students with Grade 5 abilities or higher. Such screening risks stigmatizing further those students who apply to the program but are refused admission and leaves them, perhaps, with no alternative.

Running programs that help at-risk students in the mainstream school — either as an option for all students or as educational enhancements — can be one way to avoid attaching stigma to program enrolment. Among the programs reviewed during fieldwork, those run in the mainstream school scored highest on components likely to reduce stigma, followed by programs run largely separately from the mainstream school.

3.2.4 Scheduling

Several components of programs were aimed at removing scheduling barriers to students. Three quarters of the programs were offered at different hours of the day, including offering a choice of morning or afternoon sessions or running into the evening, or ran on different days of the week (notably Flex at Carihi) and at different times of the year. The last area of flexibility allowed programs to capture students when most at-risk — such as during pregnancy — and offer some level of service during school vacations, when students might otherwise drift away from the program. Educational enhancements and alternate programs were the most likely to feature components that eased students' scheduling, and these were a special feature of programs for teenage mothers.

3.2.5 Home Connection

A number of programs made efforts to create contacts with students' lives beyond the school. Most commonly these connections were with community partners — native friendship centres, rehabilitation centres, community colleges, or daycares — which expanded students' community contacts. Some programs placed expectations on parents that may have increased parental involvement and support for their children's education. These components were very unevenly distributed, with most schools having at least one program containing such components, but not among programs in the mainstream school.

A handful of programs included outdoor education or community involvement as extra-curricular activities or as experiential material for later work in class.

3.2.6 Ancillary Supports

Meals and bus tickets were sometimes available as ancillary supports for disadvantaged students who might otherwise be unable to concentrate in class due to hunger or to get to school. However, these supports can also be viewed as incentives since receipt was always conditional upon attending and sometimes additionally upon punctuality.

3.2.7 Educational Perspectives

Connecting students with their own education could involve components such as different teaching styles, course choices, and connection with the outside world through work

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grade averages with personal characteristics and teacher assessments) may be less stigmatizing of group membership and more efficient, but again could carry the risk of stigmatizing individuals.

placements, links to external partners, and community ties. These should all aid some students to find learning relevant to their lives.

Common components of programs to help students who felt left behind by or under-stimulated by the pace of learning were flexibility in methods of instruction and self-paced learning. These components were features of most programs, but were most consistently found in in-school alternate programs, with particular emphasis in programs run for First Nations students and teenage mothers.

Most often, programs expected teachers to develop different teaching methods for program students, adjusted to help connect students to the subject matter and to their own education. This may have helped students for whom the prevalent teaching process conflicted with their learning style. Again, this component was a feature of most programs and was most consistently found in out-of-school alternate programs, especially programs for First Nations students.

Students who could not connect with mainstream educational goals could find the different expectations within programs helped them identify with the educational process. Academic expectations of students were evident in a variety of programs from vocationally oriented mainstream programs to in-school and out-of-school alternates, but were not a consistent feature of any one program structure.

There was considerable innovation in finding means of connecting with students. Several programs featured hands-on work experience as part of the curriculum, demonstrating the relevance of education to students' future lives.

Work experience is a common feature of most schools' curricula. Co-op programs and career preparation courses for grades 11 and 12 provide commonly required skills and work experience for when students enter the labour market. A variant of this option is to run courses off-site as well, for example in conjunction with a local community college. Typically, several full weeks of out-of-school, hands-on work experience is offered in conjunction with a longer period of related in-school classes. Such experience can again help students to link the demands placed upon them by school with their longer-term life chances and the requirements of the workplace. A full range of academic and vocational skill levels can be accommodated. If students can elect to follow such programs — as a complement to, rather than replacement for, academic-track courses — then there should be relatively little stigma attached to such options. Where the work experience options are restricted to non-academic track students, there may be more stigma attached to such programs.

3.2.8 Incentives

Those who need more explicit rewards than those implicit in the learning process may be encouraged to attend with incentives for attendance and reinforcement of efforts and achievement. Surprisingly few programs involved explicit incentives for effort or achievement, and even fewer for attendance. In-school alternates were strongest on offering these components, but again they were available across the range of program structures.

3.2.9 Summary

The above components illustrate the different ways in which programs attempted to encourage students to stay in school. Both components and program structures represent

responses to one or more of the theories underlying students' behaviour reviewed in Section 2. Programs thus were manifestations of the link between implicit or explicit objectives — what the schools intended to do for students in developing the programs — and the components schools felt would achieve these.

Those program components focused on reducing stigma experienced by students and connecting them to education tended to feature among mainstream programs, whereas those focused on generating a sense of belonging and providing ancillary supports (meals and transportation) and incentives were concentrated among alternate programs. Home support components were largely associated with in-school alternates.

At a general level, alternate programs were associated more closely than mainstream programs with a human services perspective of what helps students stay in school. Components associated with educational objectives were less clearly divided between programs by program structure.

One method of summarizing these associations appears in tables 5a and 5b. These indicate a measure of the *relative emphasis* placed by each type of program (by program structure in Table 5a, by target group in Table 5b) on components related to different objectives. For example, the shading in the first cell indicates that programs in the mainstream school contained a higher proportion of components related to reducing stigma than the average across all programs. The absence of shading in the penultimate cell of the same column indicates that the same programs contained a lower proportion of components related to generating incentives than the average across all programs.

The columns of Table 5a are ordered to denote the program structure as a continuum running from programs embedded in the mainstream school to out-of-school alternates. In such a continuum, programs emphasizing student adjustment components occupied an intermediate position, occurring in programs offering educational enhancements and in-school alternate programs.

Table 5b assesses the composition of two specific types of alternate program: those focused on First Nations students and those focused on teenage mothers. They share an emphasis on three objectives: sense of belonging, ancillary supports, and incentives. However, ancillary supports seem especially important to First Nations students,[7] while flexible scheduling features for teenage mothers.

Thus it seems that while the human services perspective on student retention is most strongly emphasized in alternate programs, there is no strong delineation between alternate and mainstream programs in adherence to components associated with the educational perspective. In interpreting the below average "In Mainstream School" program score in educational objectives, it is worth recalling that mainstream programs tended to support mainstream teaching. While the educational components of alternate programs tended to be provided from within the program and are included in these assessments, mainstream teaching is *not* analyzed here.

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[7]This seems to be an anomalous finding and may be associated with the omission of daycare from the list of ancillary support components.

Table 5a: Emphasis on Program Components by Program Structure: Average Ratios of Program Components by Program Type

Objective	Mainstream School	Educational Enhancements	[In-School Alternate With Drop-In]	In-School Alternate Program	[Intermediate Location Alternate Program]	Out-of-School Alternate Program
Reduce stigma	▨	▨				
Scheduling	▨	▨	▨			
Adjustment		▨		▨		
Educational		▨				
Home connection				▨	▨	▨
Sense of belonging				▨	▨	▨
Incentives				▨	▨	▨
Ancillary supports				▨	▨	▨

Notes: Shading indicates an above-average proportion of components focused on a particular objective. Absence of shading indicates an at- or below-average proportion of components focused on a particular objective.

There were varying numbers of components within each program and aligned with each objective, so the ratios of program components per program type to the average were standardized in various ways. A full description follows: The sum of the number of program occurrences of each component within each program type was divided by the number of programs in that type. These component averages were then summed for each objective and divided by the number of components in each objective. See Table 4 to determine the number of components per objective (minimum two for "ancillary supports," maximum nine for "sense of belonging"). This produced a "component proportion" for each objective and program type, ranging from 0 for dimensions where there was no component associated with an objective to 1 where the maximum number of components was associated with the objective. For example, for the out-of-school program ancillary support objective to score 1, all the out-of-school programs would have to offer both components (bus tickets and meals). If only half did so, or all offered only one, the score would be 0.5.

Using these "component proportions," the proportion of each program type devoted to each objective was determined. A program offering equal component proportions on each of the eight objectives would register 0.125 (one eighth) for each objective, whereas a program concentrated solely on delivering on one objective would score 1 for that objective and 0 for seven others. The component proportion of *all* programs devoted to each objective was also calculated. The ratios used to derive the content of tables 5a and 5b were the proportions of each program type devoted to each objective (e.g. 0.125, 1, and 0 in the examples) divided by the average across all programs. Ratios for an objective above one (shaded) indicated above-average emphasis on components in this objective for a program type. Scores at or below one indicated average or below-average emphasis.

Following the column definitions in Table 3: "Mainstream School" programs included Peer Helpers, Leadership Program, Mentoring, and Career Prep; "Educational Enhancements" included the Literacy Program; "In-School Alternates With Drop-In" included Skill Support and Alternate Program; "In-School Alternate Programs" included Work Study, Community Service Co-op, Young Parents, Flex, Growing Together, 8J9J, Nova, and Tumanos; "Intermediate Location Alternate Programs" included Transitions Co-op, Spectrum, and Sunrise; "Out-of-School Alternate Programs" included Four Directions Storefront, TAPS, TMAP, Aries, Outreach, and Total Education.

It should also be remembered that the shading in the tables indicates *relative emphasis* on components. The scoring system does not allow programs to score highly on all components. Thus the absence of shading for particular components under a program type does *not* indicate that the program type offered fewer supports in this area than other programs. It simply indicates that the program type placed rather more emphasis on other components.

Overall, there is no firm pattern in the services and educational elements offered. Most program types contain components that correspond to most perspectives on why students drop out of school. To the extent that any pattern emerges, it is one that reflects a balance between making adjustments to the face the school as an institution presents to students on one hand and focusing on the specific needs of each student as an individual on the other.

Thus, programs that aim to keep students within the mainstream school focus on minimizing stigma, adopting flexible scheduling, and helping students to adjust to their new environment. Programs that aim to keep students within school but outside of the mainstream focus on developing students' sense of belonging, offering incentives for attendance, and offering ancillary supports.

Table 5b: Emphasis on Program Components by Target Group: Average Ratios of Program Components by Program Type

Objective	Teenage Mother Programs	First Nations Student Programs
Reduce stigma		
Scheduling		
Adjustment		
Educational		
Home connection		
Sense of belonging		
Incentives		
Ancillary supports		

Notes: Shading indicates above average proportion of components focused on a particular objective. Absence of shading indicates at- or below-average proportion of components focused on a particular objective. See Table 5a for explanation of method used to derive ratios.

"Teenage Mother Programs" included Young Parents, Growing Together, and TMAP; "First Nations Students Programs" included Four Directions Storefront, Aries, Outreach, and Tumanos.

4. Definitions of Success

Definitions of success were obtained from around half the programs visited. There were considerable variations between programs, reflecting to some extent the different approaches adopted. For one mentoring program, for example, success was defined in terms of implementation goals — having achieved specific levels of student interaction or coverage — rather than long-term outcomes.

At least half the reported definitions of success included how students' behaviour responded to the program. Success was inferred if students were off the streets, had altered their attitudes or behaviour, had increased self-esteem, were enjoying or felt connected to school work, had pride in their work, or took a longer-term view of their lives. For at least four programs, success was interpreted as increased school attendance or maintaining students in the program. Five programs dealing with disadvantaged student groups saw altered student behaviours as the principal way they defined success.

Several programs defined goals in academic terms: helping students to gain credits, returning students to their appropriate grade level, and improving on grade level. Only one alternate program specifically defined success as returning students to the mainstream school, although this was an implicit goal of several.

Four programs, in judging their success, placed a high priority on graduation. The goal for two of these programs was set lower than graduation at the end of Grade 12. Completion of Grade 10 could be considered a success. In at least one school a Grade 10 leavers' certificate was available. Only one program defined success solely in academic terms as graduation from secondary school.

The relatively weak focus on high school graduation among programs themselves may reflect the difficult population they dealt with and the low expectations held by students and educators. It could also reflect the high proportion of programs that ended before Grade 12. These programs might be reluctant to define their success in terms of processes over which they had little control after students left.

What is clear is that defining success in stay-in-school programs is not straightforward. For the purposes of the present study, success might be defined as helping students to stay in school, ultimately to graduation. But it is not clear from the literature that simply converting people who would not have graduated into graduates will increase their life chances, make them more likely to gain independent income, and help them stay off income assistance.[1]

It is perhaps more appropriate to hope that in attaching students to school for longer, students will gain from the educational resources school has to offer and increase their human capital. By the time they graduate, contact with school should have aided the development of skills and experience of relevance to their own lives. The quality and relevance of the educational experience thus needs to be more than just a "hook" to attract

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[1]Such a change of label may work at the margins, since employers may respond differently to high school graduates, but over time a policy of re-labelling to graduate status may devalue graduate status in the eyes of employers.

students to school; it must also be able to develop students' cognition, knowledge, and abilities.

The important distinction in success here is between means of keeping students in school and means of educating those students who are still attending. There is a strong relationship between the two. Poor educational environments can disengage students. Non-educational components that get students back into school can bring them into contact with high-quality education that eventually engages them and justifies school attendance.

While this report has reviewed a variety of programs that aim to keep students in school, it has not been able to observe the experiences over the longer-term of students who consequently stay in school. It may be the type of education the retained students receive — in terms of process and content (which have not been a focus of this study) — that ultimately defines success for these students.

5. Supports and Barriers to Program Implementation

5.1 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SOURCES OF SUPPORT, RESOURCES, AND OPPOSITION

Schools operate within a tight set of constraints imposed by legal and social expectations and financial budgets. The operation of a stay-in-school program is rarely mandatory and so the development and establishment of a program can face a number of hurdles posed by competing priorities.

In fieldwork, school representatives — usually principals — were asked what barriers existed to the maintenance of existing programs and the development of new ones. The first answer was nearly always a shortage of financial resources. There were sometimes also human resource or infrastructure constraints that could be translated in financial terms.

A variety of factors accounted for financial resource constraints. These included the formulas used for calculating school board and individual school budgets, the applied categorizations of schools and student populations, and restrictions on how money could be spent. The implication was that stay-in-school projects carried a higher cost per student. Ultimately, a larger school budget or specific allocation would be needed for schools to develop new programs or in some cases even to preserve current programs.

However, principals identified factors additional to financial resources necessary for the development of successful stay-in-school programs. These centred on three areas: local knowledge, human resources, and partnerships. Each is discussed in turn below.

5.1.1 Local Knowledge

Schools operate *locally*. They are intimately associated with the communities from which their students are drawn. With relatively few exceptions, they have a profound influence on all households with school-age children in their catchment. It is also likely that in return — directly and through the values and attitudes imbedded in their children — these families also exert a profound influence on their local school.

Schools are thus best placed to understand the nature of the population they deal with and the problems the students face in and out of school. They will know how students in their area respond to different forms of stimulus and threat and how this affects their schooling.

Schools have developed the programs reviewed here in this local context. They have identified the problem and corresponding solution that they believe will work in their circumstances. In many cases, the program has evolved and been subject to modification over a number of years. Some changes over time have been intended. Others are forced by budgetary pressures or the departures of key staff. Whatever form of development, the schools have some form of ownership over their programs. They identify with them, are proud of their strengths and feel a responsibility to correct their weaknesses. It is not certain that the same level of commitment would apply to an intervention that did not command the

support of the school, especially if it proposed methods or objectives with which they could not identify.

Work in New York schools (Elmore, 1999) suggests that there is a distinction between the culture of a school and the practices that take place within it. Practices must fit the culture and it is unwise to try to transplant blindly practices from one school culture — where they are successful — to another.

The local knowledge embedded in schools argues for a strong involvement of schools in developing new initiatives. The knowledge, experience, and human resources required to develop and implement new programs will ultimately lie with schools.

5.1.2 Human Resources

What has emerged from the above analyses is that helping students to stay in school is a very human issue. There has been a very minor role played by technology or infrastructure. Any resources devoted to new initiatives will largely shape the way humans interact in schools.

In the development of existing programs, teachers and youth workers have often worked as entrepreneurs in developing programs. Key personnel with a passion for serving a particular at-risk student group have also proved vital to the functioning of programs. During fieldwork, interviewers reported that such key staff *were* the program, and principals spoke often of the difficulties in keeping programs running should such staff leave. The combination of institutional memory, contact network, expertise, and human skills present in program teachers and youth workers will be hard to replace.

With a view to future interventions, such staff are a resource that any future initiative can draw upon and that it would be unwise to alienate.

The principal source of interaction between schools and students is through teachers. They deliver the educational program of the school, of course, but also are principal generators of the learning environment students experience, are commonly the first line of support in the event of problems, and are the first to notice if students miss classes. If there is a mismatch between the school and student, then it is in the classroom (and in the interaction between student and teacher) where it is most likely to be experienced first. If the mismatch is to be alleviated, then it will be at least in part through actions on the part of the teacher that this comes about. Likewise, teachers must be expected to attend and commit to their students if they expect a reciprocating response from their students.

Getting the human balance right is thus not only crucial to the success of mainstream schooling, but also to the design of stay-in-school programs. Any future design has to recognize the delicately balanced agreements on staffing in schools. Schools may experience difficulties ensuring an appropriate balance of staff skills and experience, and potentially also in motivating staff, if staffing agreements concerned with recruitment, allocation, and winnowing do not recognize the importance of staffing to student retention.

5.1.3 Partnerships

Another dimension of stay-in-school programs has been schools' ability to form partnerships to establish programs within and outside schools. Such partnerships — whether with community organizations, colleges, employers, or parents — can gain students access to

additional human resources, facilities, and services. These partnerships fulfill the objectives of connecting students to relevant educational goals and provide opportunities for more appropriate ancillary supports.

Again, the school is likely to be best positioned to identify suitable partners and facilitate partnerships. But external help may be of value in identifying alliances and stimulating contact.

5.2 LESSONS LEARNED

In such a context, it would be unwise to propose an intervention from afar. Even following a review of the many different ways that schools in British Columbia can help students stay on in school, it is not a simple matter of identifying the stronger elements and combining them into a single model stay-in-school package. It is difficult to know how each will work in the context of local conditions.

Instead, it seems schools need to harness their own resources to develop initiatives that have some prospect of meeting the aim of helping students to stay in school. One way of doing this would be to produce an inventory or menu of measures that could be implemented to fulfill one or more of the objectives the school feels are particularly appropriate to its population. Schools would then choose which, or which combination, they wished to follow, or how they would amend existing programs to move closer to the recommended measure.

In developing the initiative, schools would exercise choice over their chosen intervention and the exact characteristics of the measure (whom it affected, numbers, and so on).

However, more development work on the inventory of measures is required. Such work would include clarifying the advantages and disadvantages of each approach and how this relates to the intensity with which components are delivered. This will require contact with schools where such initiatives are (or have been) in place and consultation with experts in the education field.

6. Implications for Future Demonstrations

The previous sections have established the returns to staying in school and the risks of dropping out and the program components and program structures that seem to be associated with dropout prevention strategies. The approach has been to combine themes from a literature review and field research in six British Columbia secondary schools.

While there are recurring patterns in practice that support theoretical perspectives on how to foster a supportive learning environment and increase student engagement, there is limited evidence to indicate which interventions have a causal effect on improving educational attainment. There are three basic questions that the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT) may want to consider in planning, designing, and implementing student retention / school completion demonstrations:[1]

1. What interventions are practical to implement, affordable, and have the potential to improve educational attainment based on the limited suggestive evidence that does exist?

2. What process is needed to ensure support and participation from educational stakeholders, since their support is vital to successful implementation?

3. How can these interventions be evaluated to produce more conclusive evidence on whether they do help students complete high school, access jobs or post-secondary education, avoid risk-taking behaviour, and reduce income assistance receipt or achieve other goals (see below)?

Each question is considered in turn below.

6.1 INTERVENTION OPTIONS

Suggested intervention options emerge from synthesizing what is known from the literature, the *Transitions* fieldwork, and observation of implementations elsewhere.

Change strategy and information sharing. Historically, top-down or prescriptive interventions have not been well received by teachers and other education stakeholders. Interventions are more likely to take root if they arise locally, accommodating school culture and individual school needs and priorities. External stimulus to change can serve as a catalyst for the local development of ideas. There is, however, a risk in allowing interventions to evolve that have no research or theoretical underpinnings. To ensure that information on "what works" and "what matters" inform the program design, MAETT may want to consider an intermediate approach, establishing a framework for developing program models for future demonstrations. The framework would include goals, target groups, and program components.

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[1] Funding sources and funding requirements for future demonstrations in the *Transitions* project have not been addressed in this report.

Goal setting. At a minimum, the aim would be to test the effectiveness of promising interventions that have the potential to encourage students to remain in high school and to graduate. Goals could be broadened to include improvements in academic achievement, reduction in the receipt of welfare, increases in employment after graduation, improved access to post-secondary education, and increases in personal and financial well-being (perhaps embracing such factors as improved life skills, self-esteem, and self-determination). Setting goals is an important first step since it provides the foundation for selecting appropriate intervention components.

Targeted individuals and groups. Targeting strategies need to be developed. Both schools and students could be targeted. Schools could be identified as potential study participants based on their student population (for example, having a high proportion of students with characteristics associated with dropping out). Characteristics might include teenage parenthood, First Nations status, living in households in receipt of income assistance benefits, having retaken a grade, or being over-age for grade level. The interventions would be designed to serve these students but not necessarily exclusively, dependent on each intervention's structure.

Program design and components. It would be desirable to design a program based on evidence of what works and what matters. However, as indicated in this paper, the evidence is far from conclusive. There are several components that appear promising and are prevalent in stay-in-school initiatives. We recommend that future demonstrations consider including most or all of the following as core program components:

1. **An accepting and safe environment** that provides students with a sense of belonging. This would permit a more personalized, supportive learning environment among students and between students and teachers, which could foster positive relationships with caring adults. The location of the program and program structure will depend on the type of students targeted.

2. **Integration into the mainstream.** Maximizing the opportunity for students to be included within mainstream schooling and benefit from the full range of curricular options and minimizing opportunities for stigma. Segregated supports may still be required. These could offer environments for educational enhancement on a temporary basis for students who have fallen behind. There may need to be changes in the mainstream model for it to embrace such students.

3. **Engagement** in teaching and learning practices, to ensure the active participation of students in their own learning.

4. **Flexible instructional practices or scheduling** to accommodate different learning styles and individual situations. This component should facilitate learning and improve attendance. Instructional practices could include individualized self-paced learning, experiential learning, and some group activities to connect individuals with the school work and with each other. There should be opportunities to learn both in the classroom and the broader community through field trips, cultural outings, and work-based learning. Extending the classroom into the community will help make education more relevant to students' lives.

5. **A rigorous and relevant curriculum** that prepares students for graduation, career training, post-secondary education, or transition from school to work. A rigorous program reduces the risk of stigma, particularly if combined with options for mobility between mainstream and alternate programs. The program should have high, realistic expectations founded in the belief that all students can succeed.

6. **Support and recognition for success** to induce students to come to school and to reward good performance. These could involve meal programs, transportation vouchers, and official displays and award ceremonies to acknowledge students who have achieved certain milestones.

7. **Dedicated and competent staff** to help students deal with personal and situational problems that interfere with their educational experience. These could include counselling and teaching staff, social workers, and part-time professional and support staff. Counsellors could come from the school, community, or even the public service, but would need to be stationed in schools to be effective. Counsellors should also be aware of community resources for students who need special help and work in partnership with parents and other agencies to help students achieve success.

8. **Professional development opportunities** for staff to help them work effectively with a diverse group of students, accommodate different learning styles, and create teacher-learning communities where teachers can work with and learn from each other.

9. **Appropriate community-based programs and activities during non-school hours.** The after-school hours and summer months are often times when young people lack adult supervision and have idle time on their hands. If possible, it would be useful to add after-school and summer components. These could include a range of activities from tutorial support to participation in extracurricular activities, paid jobs, or community service.

10. **Ongoing and comprehensive system of program evaluation.** Activities would involve ongoing and formative evaluation and collaboration between participants and evaluators in formulating overall goals and design. Students should be followed up over time.

Most of the programs in schools visited during *Transitions* field research had some but not all the above elements. The challenge in these schools would be either to enhance these smaller discrete programs or build more robust interventions incorporating these program components in the overall plan.

6.2 SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

New education programs have the best chance of taking root and developing if they arise locally with support and involvement of the participating school staff. The challenge is how to combine the desire to have certain components and program structures incorporated into

the intervention (based on the suggestive research evidence) with the need to nurture and support local ideas. Here are some ideas that may help facilitate this process:

1. Sponsor a forum of interested ministries (MAETT, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Human Resources, Ministry for Children and Families) and representatives from selected British Columbia secondary schools. The objectives, targeting strategy, program structures, and components outlined in this report could serve as the starting point for the discussion. Participants in the forum would work together to identify

   a. the goals of a potential demonstration,

   b. the core components and program structures for intervention strategies,

   c. a targeting strategy for schools and students, and

   d. an evaluation plan.

2. Schools would have some latitude either to enhance existing programs or to design new ones so long as the core elements were included. The ministries would need to decide whether to select sites via a competitive process or use a pre-selection strategy based on objective criteria. To assure school support, 80 to 90 per cent of the school staff would need to be in favour of the project.

3. The co-operating ministries might also want to consider providing technical support to schools (either directly or via consultants) during the planning and implementation processes.

4. It may also be advisable to convene one or more forums for the participating schools during the planning process to share ideas and build a network.

6.3 RAISING THE STANDARDS OF EVIDENCE IN LEARNING WHAT WORKS

British Columbia could be a pioneer in building more conclusive evidence on which interventions are successful in improving educational attainment and preventing welfare dependence. The challenge is designing an evaluation that will produce reliable findings, that is feasible to implement, and that local education stakeholders support. The key is to encourage schools to support the evaluation in much the same way they support the reform. They need to be involved in the evaluation design and analysis. A good starting point is for the evaluator to work with the schools to formulate the questions the evaluation will attempt to answer. This consensus-building process around the evaluation will help build local ownership in the study. The evaluation plan should also include periodic formative feedback to highlight both operational successes and problems that need attention. This type of regular feedback is commonly welcomed by school staff as a way to make program adjustments during the early stages of implementation.

6.3.1 Alternative Evaluation Designs

The scope and timeframe for the evaluation will depend on resources. At a minimum, the evaluation should be structured to answer the key impact questions of whether the interventions improve educational attainment and prevent welfare dependence. To do this

reliably requires comparing educational and welfare outcomes of the program participants to a control or comparison group that does not receive these services (the "counterfactual").

Random assignment is widely recognized as the most reliable way to measure impacts because the design controls for both measured and unmeasured characteristics between the program group that receives the services and the control group that does not. However, random assignment designs are generally not appropriate in school settings, especially when the intervention under study affects all students in the school.

Schools can be randomly assigned to experiment (program) and control (non-program) groups, but large numbers of schools need to be involved if any statistically significant impacts are to be observed. Since demonstration resources are likely to be limited, randomly assigning schools could work if the demonstration schools were selected through a competitive process. The ministries would select twice as many schools as could be funded. Schools would then be randomly assigned as experimental or control schools. Feasibility challenges remain, as control schools must still co-operate with data collection.

There are some next-best alternatives to an experimental design that could be considered. One is a cohort comparison design (often referred to as a "time-series design") that compares the outcomes for the students in the intervention with earlier cohorts of students who were enrolled in the school before the implementation of the intervention. This design is feasible if there have been no major shifts in student demographics or mobility patterns over the study period, no major changes in the school context, and there are reliable school administrative records.

The potential impact designs discussed above are geared to determining if an intervention works. In addition to the impact design and formative feedback, it would be advantageous to include an implementation study to capture how the intervention unfolds and what practices seem to account for the observed impacts. Finally, a benefit–cost analysis may be desirable to examine the cost-effectiveness of the program from the perspectives of the participants, government, and society as a whole.

6.3.2 Data Requirements

Some combination of baseline demographic information, school administrative records, welfare administrative data, and follow-up surveys would be required for the evaluation. It would also be important to have sufficiently large samples in order to look at the relationships between intervention outcomes and individual background characteristics to help explain why some students benefited from the program and others did not. For example, a key question would be how well do students in income assistance households fare compared with other subgroups? Such findings could help identify factors that enhance or limit the effectiveness of the program and thereby provide both guidance for improving its design and valuable information for targeting the approach.

6.3.3 Duration of a Demonstration

The timetable for any demonstration would need to extend at least to the scheduled high school graduation date for an incoming cohort of students. This means a follow-up period of at least five years, since most secondary schools start at Grade 8. Extending the follow-up period longer would be necessary to analyze longer-term effects on welfare reduction, post-secondary enrolment, employment, and earnings.

Pilot testing of a demonstration could proceed in 1999/2000 by selecting one or a few sites and using the first semester/term for development, with implementation in the second, to identify any difficulties with implementation.

The selection of the specific research design will depend on the intervention and the policy questions of interest, available resources, and the engagement of the participating schools.

7. Conclusions

Finding ways to help students to complete their high school education and advance academically holds the prospect of benefiting both individuals and government through the expectation of better employment, better parenting, and less dependence on transfer income. Several theoretical perspectives point to ways in which programs can provide such help, but evidence about their effectiveness for Canadian students is limited.

Fieldwork undertaken for *Transitions* points to ways in which schools can match program components and program structures to their assessment of the types of dropout problems affecting their students. They may wish to target specific groups of students who exhibit particular risk factors, aim for more inclusive policies to keep such students in the mainstream, or combine approaches to create a flexible system of educational and behavioural supports.

Transitions has identified program components that reflect theoretical perspectives on why students drop out and that appear to have been endorsed by schools, as evidenced by their presence in multiple programs. These include human services supports — creating a supportive and welcoming environment for students through access to a caring adult, increasing the numbers of teaching and counselling staff per student, and enhancing connection to peers — and educational elements — placing different expectations on teachers, adapting to different learning styles, and making education more relevant to students' lives.

The consistencies between the literature and the fieldwork suggest that interventions encompassing the following elements may have the best chance for success:

1. A strategy for change with information sharing

2. Clear goals

3. Targeted individuals and groups

4. A program design embracing most or all of the following components:

   a. An accepting and safe environment

   b. Integration into the mainstream

   c. Engagement in teaching and learning practices

   d. Flexible instructional practices or scheduling

   e. A rigorous and relevant curriculum

   f. Support and recognition for success

   g. Dedicated and competent staff

   h. Professional development opportunities

   i. Appropriate community-based programs and activities during non-school hours

   j. Ongoing and comprehensive system of program evaluation

Building a partnership among interested ministries, British Columbia schools, and other agencies would provide a unique opportunity for developing interventions that have high prospects of both enhancing the life chances of British Columbia youth and building more conclusive evidence of what works in improving educational attainment and reducing dropout rates.

Appendix A: Reviewed Canadian Stay-in-School Programs

Those programs marked with an asterisk (*) were reviewed in the report *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Employment Programs and Services for Youth* prepared by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) for Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) in 1996.

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL PROGRAMS

*National Stay-in-School Initiative (1991–1994)

Manitoba School Improvement Program (1991–)

*Work Orientation Workshops (1985–)

*Canada/New Brunswick Youth Strategy (1988–94)

*Canada/Newfoundland Youth Strategy (1988–94)

70001 Employment and Training Institute: Youth Employment Skills (1986–)

British Columbia Youth Employment Skills Program (1996–)

Canada and US-wide: Teen Outreach Program (1981–)

Government of Yukon Ministry of Education: Changing the education infrastructure (1998–)

LOCALIZED INITIATIVES

The Innovation Network: Academic Credit and Career Training (Saskatchewan 1995–)

Ontario Student Secondary School Retention (1989)

Computers for Schools (Quebec)

Fredericton: Partners for Youth (New Brunswick, 1996–)

Etobicoke High School: CAPSLE — Community Alternative Program for Suspended Learners (Ontario)

Ontario Ministry of Citizenship Anti-Racism Secretariat and Ontario Ministry of Education and Training: Change Your Future (1991–)

Laval: Curé-Antoine-Labelle Secondary School

Ontario Ministry of Education and Training: Education Work Connections (1990–)

Fredericton High School: Student Parent Program (New Brunswick, 1991–)

Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton: The Parent Companions Program (1994–)

Kingston: The Special Delivery Club (Kingston, 1990–)

Estevan Comprehensive Alternate School (Saskatchewan, 1994–)

Ottawa: Youville Centre (Ontario)

Edmonton: Eastwood Outreach Program (Alberta)

Stay In — You Win (Alberta, 1992)

Lockeport Regional High School (Nova Scotia, 1993–94)

RELATED FIRST NATIONS PROJECTS

The First Nations Schools Association: Seventh Generation Club (1995–)

Indian Head School Division: Family Liaison Program (Saskatchewan, 1994–)

Prince Albert: Won Ska Cultural School (Saskatchewan, 1994–)

Plains Indians Cultural Survival School (Alberta, 1979–)

SCHOOL-BASED PROJECTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Fairview Elementary School: Follow Your Dreams, Stay in School

Canadian Football League: Stay in School

Champions Stay in School: "Second Shot" for 13–24 year olds and "Voices of the Spirit" literacy component

Langley Education Centre PASS (Pathfinder Alternate Secondary School)

PROGRAMS IN THE *TRANSITIONS* PILOT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Vancouver Eastside

Vancouver Technical College: Spectrum, Sunrise Alternative School, Career Preparation, Tumanos

Britannia Community Secondary School: Aries Project

Britannia Community Centre: Life Start Project

Eagle High

East Side School

John Oliver Secondary School Bridge Program

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House Southtown Program

Total Education

YWCA Focus (King George Secondary School)

Tupper Mini School for Teenage Parents

Family Services of Greater Vancouver: Vector Youth Services programs including Learning Project, Job Club Plus, Vector Youth Activity Centre, Parent–Teen Mediation Service,

Summer Recreational Programs, The Unloading Zone Self-Management Program, and Between Friends — Peer Counselling Program.

Campbell River

Timberline Secondary School Learning Assistance Program

Carihi Secondary School Young Parents Program, Student Development Centre, and Learning Assistance Program

Prince George

Stay in School Initiative (START)

Appendix B: Research Process

This study consisted of two phases: a review of the literature relevant to Canadian stay-in-school programs and an examination of selected programs in British Columbia schools that aim to maintain or re-establish the connection between students and secondary education.

The following sections describe the research process used to conduct the fieldwork for the second phase of the study.

B.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The sample selection comprised two parts. First, the team had to identify appropriate schools for the study. Based on available resources and timeline for the study, the number of schools for the study was restricted to between six and eight. Second, the team worked with selected schools to identify the programs that helped students *go further in school* for later fieldwork visits by the team.

B.1.1 How Schools Were Selected

The selection of schools was driven mainly by three factors: (1) the interest in First Nations students, teenage mothers, and students from low-income families; (2) geographic representation; and (3) the school's willingness to participate in the study. In addition, the study wanted to learn from existing innovations, so it was desirable that schools could demonstrate success in graduation rates and other achievement levels.

In order to target the three groups of students and *successful* schools, the initial plan was to select schools that appeared to be performing well with high proportions of students from low-income families. The selection would involve two information sources — proportion of students receiving income assistance benefits and school graduation rates.

B.1.2 Proportion of Students Receiving Income Assistance Benefits

To inform the selection process, the British Columbia Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) and Ministry of Education (MEd) provided the proportion of individuals under the age of 19 who were enrolled in Grade 12 in British Columbia secondary schools in 1996 and in receipt of income assistance benefits at age 19.5.[1] This information (or variable) was used as a proxy for the level of welfare dependence at each school. Schools were ranked by this variable, from schools with the lowest proportion of students receiving income assistance benefits at age 19.5 to the highest. To reduce this list to a smaller or targeted group, schools were selected only if they met both of the following requirements:

- The school was present in the upper quartile[2] of schools representing high proportions of Grade 12 students receiving income assistance benefits at age 19.5.

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[1]Individuals age 19 or older are no longer considered as dependent on their parent or parents' income assistance if they are not attending school. They are generally required to apply for income assistance as an individual case.
[2]The first explorations were with the top decile.

- The number of these students receiving income assistance was 50 or more, to ensure that there was a sufficiently high number of students in households receiving income assistance in the school. For example, this second criterion eliminated one school that had 38 per cent of the students on income assistance but where the actual number of students receiving income assistance was only 13.

This first step identified eight schools in different areas in the province that met the above selection requirements.

B.1.3 School Graduation Rates

Once schools with high numbers and proportions of *low-income families* were identified, the next stage was to ascertain whether these schools were *performing well*. To do this, MEd and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) tried to determine graduation rates for selected groups of students starting at Grade 8 in different years in the eight schools. This proved difficult. A fully satisfactory analysis would have required additional resources. The criterion based on graduation rates was replaced with a subjective one. If the selected schools reported or claimed to have a number of stay-in-school programs, which were in their view successful, they were invited to participate in the study. It was not possible to include all such programs at selected schools. Exclusion of a program at any one of these schools is no reflection on its efficacy. To some degree, schools self-selected into the study.

In summary, the study selected eight schools that had high proportions and numbers of students receiving income assistance benefits at age 19.5. Seven of the eight schools were contacted, with the eighth to be included only if schools in the first group declined to participate. The goal was to visit six schools.

Since this was a purposive sample, findings cannot be generalized to all stay-in-school programs operating in British Columbia schools.

B.1.4 Contacting Schools

SRDC sent two letters to principals at seven of the eight schools. These letters were copied to the appropriate school district superintendents. The first letter was from the Ministry of Advanced Education Training and Technology (MAETT), informing principals about *Transitions* and SRDC's role and asking for their assistance. The second letter from SRDC gave more detailed information about the research process, the output, and the benefits for parties involved. It also asked the principal to assign an individual as the liaison for the study.

A week after the letters were sent, SRDC called the principals to find out whether they were interested in participating in the study, to give more information about the project and fieldwork, and to learn more about particular activities in the school that might be contributing to keeping students in school. SRDC spoke to six of the seven schools.[3] They all agreed to participate and they all operated stay-in-school activities or programs. The final selection comprised six schools: Britannia Community Secondary School, Vancouver; Carihi Secondary, Campbell River; Guildford Park Secondary, Surrey; Norkam Secondary,

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[3]Although a liaison had been assigned at the seventh school, SRDC was unable to talk to the liaison before the end of the fieldwork, and had to drop the school from the sample.

Kamloops; Prince George Secondary, Prince George; and Vancouver Technical Secondary, Vancouver.

B.1.5 How Programs Were Selected

The research team talked to the liaison, often the principal, to find out more about each program at the school. The team selected programs for further observation based on the purpose of the research, the focus on First Nations students or teenage mothers, and on the information about the program available from the liaison. On average, the research team selected four programs for further inquiry at each school.

The key element across these programs was that they were "stay-in-school" initiatives. These programs were most often alternative schools (schools-within-a-school, storefront education centres, and theme schools for First Nations or teenage parent students) and some school-wide initiatives (mentoring, peer tutoring, and counselling strategies) and curricular options (school-to-career and co-op placements). The selected programs include students in grades 8 through 12. The liaison arranged the visits for the research team.

B.2 RESEARCH METHODS

The research took the form of short, qualitative case studies. A description of the data collection follows.

B.2.1 Data Collection

The research team visited 24 programs at the six schools between April 19, 1999, and May 20, 1999. Interviewing was the main tool for collecting information about the programs. Other information, although not available for all programs, came from various documents (brochures, annual reports) and classroom observations.

B.2.2 Interviews

The liaison and research team identified appropriate people for the interviews. The team spoke to key people associated with each of the special programs and schools, including at least one representative from each program, administrators, students, and other staff members at the school.[4] In sum, the research team interviewed 7 administrators, 10 family and youth workers, 18 teachers, 22 students, and 3 other staff members. The interviews were held at the school either in meeting rooms, offices, or classrooms during school hours, usually in a quiet location free from distractions.[5]

The research team developed two interview guides — one for principals, teachers, and counsellors and the other for students. The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended questions and asked individuals for information and experiences (self-reported techniques). A two-person team conducted nearly all interviews, with one member responsible for taking interview notes. In addition, one individual from the research team attended almost all interviews ("designated interviewer") to provide checks on the consistency of the data

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[4]The initial plan included interviewing parents, but the timeframe and resources were insufficient to conduct these interviews.

[5]Several programs were off school grounds, and the interviewers went to the specific sites.

collection across programs and the interpretation of collected information that might be influenced if different interviewers visited different programs.

The interview guide for administrators and school staff had several key components. It collected detailed information about the genesis and evolution of the program; key activities of program; measures of success; and an evaluation, from their perspective, of strengths, weaknesses, and limitations as well as of the extent of any institutional barriers and how they were overcome. The interview guide for students collected information about their experiences in the program and within the mainstream school.

The interviews generally took between half an hour and one hour to complete. The field notes were typed up shortly after each visit.

B.2.3 Data Analysis

The research team collected information on 24 programs. Once the interview notes were typed, each team member individually reviewed and analyzed the notes. The team met to compare their analyses and discuss emerging themes. The programs varied on numerous dimensions including the type of students served by the program. In order to make sense of the narrative data, the team developed coding or classification systems that looked for dominant patterns: commonly recurring components (e.g. access to a caring adult) and program structures (e.g. alternate program within school) that might help identify how programs aimed to deliver on their explicit and implicit objectives. The team developed these categories based on the field data, evidence from elsewhere in Canada and the US, and perspectives on why students drop out and what appropriate remedies might be. Finally, guided by theoretical perspectives and field data, the team built from components and program structures the more general themes — an educational theme and human services theme. A two-member team analyzed the field notes and coded or marked categories according to this classification for each program, thus allowing all programs to be analyzed according to the analysis scheme.

B.2.4 Fact Checking

The first draft of the report was sent to all six school representatives, usually principals. They were asked to verify the information reported about their programs, to identify errors, and to comment on the report findings and recommendations.

B.3 RESEARCH TEAM

The research team consisted of five members of SRDC staff who brought a wide range of experience and expertise to the project. All members of the team have research experience with low-income families and collectively have a solid understanding of issues and barriers facing households receiving income assistance benefits.

One team member is a recognized expert in US education reform and youth programs. Another attended and graduated from one of the Vancouver secondary schools selected for the study and thus brought a personal perspective and background knowledge to the consideration of Vancouver schools and communities. The others contributed valuable national and international perspectives to the study (Canada, US, and UK). All members have extensive experience with interviewing and fieldwork.

Appendix C: British Columbia Secondary Schools and Programs Visited During Fieldwork

Researchers interviewed teachers, counsellors, and students from 23 programs at six schools and went to one senior alternative, Total Education, which until recently operated completely independently. A description of each program follows.

BRITANNIA COMMUNITY SECONDARY SCHOOL

Britannia Community Secondary School is an inner-city school serving Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. It has approximately 1,000 students in grades 8 to 12, 17 per cent of whom are of First Nations ancestry. Researchers visited four programs at this school ranging from mainstream programs to alternatives located outside the school.

Aries

The Aries program is a collaboration between the Vancouver School Board and the Urban Native Youth association and administered by Britannia to serve "street-entrenched" First Nations students. Enrolment in Aries fluctuates because of the transient nature of its student population and because no eligible student is refused entry into the program. One teacher and three support staff are available to assist students.

Housed in the aboriginal friendship centre, Aries provides a safe place for students who face multiple barriers to academic success. It gives them an opportunity to begin to learn again and explore life regardless of personal background, legal situations, or behavioural problems.

Aries provides an educational component to its students, which is self-paced and customized to individual instructional levels. Academics are undertaken in the morning. Afternoons are spent in a variety of activities, such as life skills workshops, health information, individual counselling, and field trips. Students are provided with breakfast and lunch and can sign up to stay for dinner.

The Britannia Project

The Britannia Project — originally called the "Mentoring Program" — began as a pilot in September 1998. It is available to all students from kindergarten to Grade 12 at Britannia Community Secondary School. Secondary school students sign up for the program after an information session with the coordinator. About 100 students sign up and three quarters are matched with mentors. Students range from high achievers who want to learn about jobs to at-risk students who need role models or tutoring.

The objective of the program is to link students with caring adults who can have positive influences on them — by listening to their problems and providing guidance to them on educational, personal, and employment choices. Mentors are recruited mainly from the business community and trained by the Rotary Club. Time commitment can be anything from

a single hour together to one hour per week for a semester. For the upcoming school year, the project will expand to two additional secondary schools and one elementary feeder school.

Outreach

Outreach is another off-site alternative for First Nations students. It is a cultural, academic, and social program for students who have disconnected in some way from the mainstream. The program started in 1976 with federal funding and was later taken over by the school board and administered through Britannia Community Secondary School. About 40 students are registered in the program, supported by six staff.

Outreach is a Grade 8 to Grade 11 program that offers core curriculum subjects and electives to its students. Study is self-paced, based on assessment testing using Stanford's or the Canadian Achievements Test. There is a lot of outdoor education at Outreach, which is used to connect students to native culture and their subjects. Writing, for example, is generated from these activities. Students in Grade 11 or over age 18 spend less time in outdoor education so they can concentrate on academic subjects. Meals, bus tickets, or bus passes are provided to students while they are in school.

The philosophy of the program is presented in four "R"s: Respect, Responsibility, Rights, and Recognition. Using these principles, outreach becomes a safe environment for learning and personal growth. Staff build relationships with students in order to earn their trust to deal with personal issues. They also partner with outside agencies for more difficult counselling issues. The native medicine wheel is used to display progress made by students in all aspects of their lives.

Because it does not encompass Grade 12, students cannot graduate from Outreach. Instead, for high school completion they may go on to other senior alternatives or the native education centre or move on to vocational training or work placements.

8J9J

A junior alternative within Britannia, 8J9J is known as the oldest alternative in Canada and has staff going back to its start in 1971. It delivers grades 8, 9, and 10 education to 20 students aged 13 to 16 who have fallen behind their grade level. 8J9J works on a semester system, which allows students to come into the program mid-year with credit from previous work, instead of having to repeat the whole year.

This is a highly structured academic program provided in a nurturing environment. Its aim is to see students complete Grade 10. All subjects are taught by one teacher to the whole group in creative ways to keep them engaged in their work. However, students work on Math independently at their own individual levels. Visual displays and field trips are organized around the subjects being studied. There are expectations for student behaviour, and rewards and recognition are a big part of encouraging students to academic success.

The program provides breakfast to students who arrive on time and lunch to those who need it. These are scheduled at different times from the mainstream school, as are all activities of the program.

In general, students who graduate from 8J9J return to the mainstream or continue to Grade 12 in a senior alternative.

CARIHI SECONDARY SCHOOL

One of two senior secondary schools in Campbell River, Carihi Secondary serves about 860 students in grades 10, 11, and 12. It provides a wide variety of programs to meet the needs of its students. Interviewers visited five of these programs.

Community Service Co-op

The Community Service Co-op is presented as a challenging option to a regular academic year. It is aimed at Grade 10 students who are not enjoying school or not feeling empowered while there. This group could range from high-potential students to those expected to fail. After a selection process, about 28 students a year are invited to participate in the co-op program and are supervised by a teacher and an assistant.

Students spend the entire first semester as a group with one instructor who teaches English, Social Studies, and Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) and supervises the co-op education. The first semester is organized into two-week segments, alternating between two weeks of academic subjects and two weeks of working on community projects. In the second semester students take Math, Science, and an elective outside the program and meet together as a group for physical education.

As a mainstream program, this option has attempted to avoid stigma by not limiting enrolment to at-risk students and by publicizing the work done by students in the community. The mix of students also provides for role models within the peer group. Team building is a big part of this program; time is spent on activities such as Christmas celebrations and field trips that promote connection with peers and staff. Although success is measured in terms of an increase in enjoyment and pride and reaching individual potential, academic subjects are not secondary in this program. Students are made accountable for handing in assignments, and the teacher estimates that 80 per cent of students in this option improve their grade level.

Flex Program

The Flex program at Carihi is designed to accommodate students who can attend school only part time due to personal and situational factors or the need to work and who would otherwise drop out of school. Students are referred to Flex by counsellors or opt in voluntarily. About 40 students take advantage of this option, which is run by one teacher.

Classes are individualized and self-paced. Students in the program take between one and three subjects at a time within their individual timetables and may even take classes within the mainstream in addition to their time at Flex.

As the name implies, flexibility is the key component of this alternative. It aims to accommodate students until they are ready to return to school full time. Flexibility means that there is little group connection, but students felt no stigma in taking this alternative.

Leadership Program

The Leadership Program is an elective offered to students at Carihi for credit and for which they are graded. About 30 students — mostly girls — register for this course in grades 10, 11, and 12. Students who register for this option are generally high achievers.

Students in the Leadership Program organize student activities, such as school assemblies, and find creative ways of celebrating and recognizing the different achievements and social activities for students in the school. The program aims to foster student empowerment through peer collaboration.

Leadership students are required to undertake 10 hours of community service per semester, which involves activities outside of the school like organizing events at elementary school, doing hamper drives, and volunteering at town festivals. The Leadership students are organized into three permanent committees and may create temporary committees to organize special events. All Leadership students meet once a week early in the morning. Committees meet over lunch to coordinate activities.

There is no students' council at Carihi because of the presence of Leadership students. Participants in this program find that they are more aware of events in the school and acquire valuable, organization, and communication skills as well as learn to take responsibility. Students also feel able to connect better with staff because of their involvement in this program.

Literacy Program

The Literacy Program is an educational enhancement that was designed by a teacher to address the problem of students who are having difficulties reading. It is delivered by the same teacher. The students in this program are not behind their grade in reading because of learning disabilities, but rather because of home environment, lack of voluntary practice, or predisposition. They may not have mastered or exercised decoding skills or may have limited vocabulary due to lack of exposure. The teacher works with around 12 students at a time who are almost all male and who choose to be in the program.

Students meet one-on-one with the teacher for 25-minute sessions two or three times a week at a time convenient to both student and teacher. This session is spent reading with students around subjects of interest to them in order to begin making it an enjoyable experience. Skills are taught using a whole language approach rather than by using a remedial model of instruction.

By choosing this option rather than being required to enrol, students are thought unlikely to experience stigma in seeking extra help. Anecdotal data collected by the teacher before and after students enrol in the program suggests that students have stayed in school because of this measure and begin to read voluntarily on their own because it is no longer a difficulty.

Young Parents Program

The Young Parents Program (YPP) is an option for students at Carihi who are actively parenting and thus have difficulty meeting attendance requirements for success in the mainstream school. Two teachers work with about 50 young parents between 16 and 21 years of age over the course of a school year. This includes a few young fathers and pregnant students who can benefit from family management and parenting classes.

Students in YPP can take a variety of academic courses and electives between Grade 10 and Grade 12 levels and study at their own pace in order to complete exams for credit. Young parents also have the option of taking courses within the main school, particularly if they wish to write provincial exams, which are not offered through YPP. Education is one element

of the program; the others are daycare, health services, and support services. Parents in YPP have access to a fully licensed daycare while they are at school and for emergency appointments that they are unable to schedule outside school hours. Health care components are delivered by Family Services in Campbell River.

The program is located in a portable on the grounds of the school. The environment is geared to fostering relationships among the students and with their teachers. Students are on a first-name basis with teachers and the interaction with peers experiencing similar difficulties helps students cope and persevere. Attendance and accountability for missed days are stressed as necessary for success, so students are expected to be at school every day or call in to let teachers know why they cannot be in school. Incentives for attendance are provided through a system of rewards.

GUILDFORD PARK SECONDARY SCHOOL

This school has about 1,200 students in grades 8 through 12. Guildford Park is classified as an inner city school and serves an area that has a high immigrant population. SRDC met with staff involved in three alternative programs at Guildford.

Alternate Program

The Alternate Program is a district initiative located at Guilford Park, to provide extra supports to students up to age 16 with moderate to severe behavioural problems. Ten students in grades 8 to 10 gain access to two half-time teachers and one half-time daycare worker. Students are referred to the Alternate Program by Surrey District Student Services.

Students enrolled in this program have access to an alternate classroom where they can drop in at any time for assistance or to work with the alternate teacher. The object of the program is reintegration into the mainstream. This is undertaken on an individual basis at a pace each student is comfortable with. A new student may take only physical education or home economics in the mainstream and do academic subjects with the alternate teacher. A more advanced or confident student may go to the alternate room only for extra support.

The program provides a safe place for students who have trouble fitting into the mainstream. Teachers are flexible in their approach to students in order to accommodate their individual needs. The location within the main school building helps these students feel like they are still part of the school, while providing a safe environment.

Growing Together

Growing Together is an education and daycare program for pregnant and parenting adolescents under 20 years of age registered in grades 8 to 12. The program was developed in response to concerns about inadequate social and educational services for adolescent mothers and their children. It can enrol between 35 and 40 students, who must secure a daycare spot before they are admitted. Growing Together is staffed by three teachers and one counsellor.

This is a fairly structured program that requires students to complete at least two courses per semester and attend at least 80 per cent of the time including validated excusable absences. Students, except pregnant girls, are partially integrated into the mainstream in order to take courses that meet graduation requirements. Young girls who are homebound

because they are close to delivery or have a newborn can have work taken back and forth by a homebound teacher. These students generally return to regular classes six weeks after the birth. There is a full-time counsellor attached to the program available to help students deal with the difficulties balancing the responsibilities of motherhood and school work.

The goal of the program is improved academic performance. Participants are expected to work to complete courses for graduation. The staff team works to provide structure for the students in order for them to be able to meet this goal. Growing Together offers custom locally developed courses to its students that focus on developing life skills and parenting skills and personal growth. It provides opportunities for support to students in the program who are expected to pass these courses in order to graduate.

Transitions Co-op

The Transitions Co-op is a partnership between Guildford Park Secondary School and the Guildford Learning Centre. It serves students aged 15 and older who are one or two grades behind for their age group and who are frustrated with school due to learning disabilities but who have a desire or motivation to succeed. The program has enrolled 10 students in grades 9 to 11 and has one teacher who also acts as the frontline counsellor to students. Students are selected for the program through consultation of student records and interviews with students and parents.

Program participants spend mornings with the Guildford Park teacher doing non-academic and locally developed career and job preparation courses. In the afternoons, they go to the Guildford Learning Centre to work on academic courses at their own pace and level. Students go on two work placements per semester, each lasting two to three weeks to fulfill the co-op requirement and provide for career exploration.

NORKAM SECONDARY SCHOOL

Norkam Secondary School is a Grade 8 to Grade 12 school located in Kamloops in the British Columbia interior. The Kamloops school district First Nations initiative is located at Norkam and 13 per cent of its students are of First Nations descent. Interviewers spoke with staff about three initiatives at the school.

Four Directions Storefront School

Four Directions Storefront School is an off-site alternative for at-risk First Nations learners. Students at Storefront may be adult or school-aged, but must be at least 15 years old. They may be young people who have already disconnected from school. Alternatively, they may be transferred from secondary schools around the district to avoid disconnection because of non-attendance, tardiness, lack of production, or social and emotional issues. Some are young parents. Staff consists of one teacher and a First Nations support worker who work with close to 60 students per year.

The mission of the school is to give its students the opportunity to learn about their culture, build confidence and pride, and focus on academic skills as well as life skills. In order to do this, days are split into two sections. Mornings are spent doing academic coursework individually and using various programs suited to each learner. Afternoons are used for a variety of activities and study, such as physical education, First Nations study,

career and personal planning, or computers. Teachers direct adult students towards the GED or an adult graduation diploma. School-aged students work towards graduation or reintegration to the mainstream.

Staff emphasize safety, respect, and accountability. School-aged students are expected to be in school every day from Monday to Friday or to account for absences. Parents are encouraged to help keep students accountable for attendance. The location of the school off campus is considered important for students in order to avoid stigma. There is provision for participation in extracurricular activities with mainstream students.

The program partners with the Native Friendship Centre to provide extra support services for participants such as an on-site daycare and after-school activities for students.

Peer Counselling / Peer Mediation

Peer counselling is an effort to connect senior students with incoming Grade 8 students in order to ease their transition into secondary school. A survey among feeder schools determined that Grade 7 students were apprehensive at the prospect of being with older students, not having friends, and keeping up with the semester system. Two counsellors and the drama teacher supervise about 40 hand-selected Peer Helpers from the senior grades who spend time training in communication, conflict resolution, and group dynamics before they meet with Grade 8 students.

Peer Helpers meet Grade 8 students in their home rooms every other week for 20 minutes and organize presentations on subjects that they think would be helpful to new students, such as racism, goal setting, peer pressure, and healthy eating. Every Grade 8 student is exposed to a peer helper and this helps them settle into the new school sooner and fosters a general sense of acceptance within the school.

Peer mediators are a subset of the peer counsellors who receive extra training to mediate conflict, such as bullying, name-calling, harassing, and shoving, which can occur in a school setting. They do this using a model developed by staff based on training from the Justice Institute. Peer mediators work on solutions without the presence of adults. They create a contract agreed upon by both parties for future interaction. Students involved in these programs receive credit for their efforts.

Work Study Program

The Work Study Program is non-academic option that arose in recognition of students who were completing Grade 10 at 18 years of age and were not employable. The original design included grades 11 and 12, but later Grade 10 was added to the program. Two teachers deliver the four core academic subjects to all grade levels and supervise work placements for about 40 students from around the Kamloops school district. The design is intended for students 15 years of age and over who are struggling academically in English and Mathematics. Most are two or three years behind their grade level.

Students in the Work Study Program must take their core Grade 9 to Grade 12 subjects and add a work component. The program has three levels. Level one students in Grades 9 and 10 have four placements a year, for two hours in the afternoon each day. They are evaluated and supervised by the school. The purpose of this placement is career exploration. At level

two and three, when students are in grades 11 and 12, they go out on one-week work placements in jobs of their choice, based on previous experience.

The program works by providing structured expectations, fairness, and success. The jobs give students who have had difficulty at school an opportunity to be successful. They also provide positive adult mentors for them in the community. The teacher works to generate community support, particularly from parents who are concerned about their children going on a non-academic track. Students may graduate with work credits, which count towards apprenticeships for some careers, and a significant number graduate high school each year.

PRINCE GEORGE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Prince George Secondary School (PGSS) is located in northern British Columbia and serves a student population of 1,600 with about 200 First Nations students. It provides all secondary school grades but has a disproportionately large senior population because two of its three feeder schools are middle schools. Researchers visited three of the options available to students.

Teen Mothers' Alternative Program

The Teen Mothers' Alternative Program (TMAP) was established for young mothers or expectant mothers who were not connected to school or were being unsuccessful in school. It is in its second year of operation. The young mothers in this program are between 14 and 19 years of age and have one teacher and one youth and family worker to support them. About 40 students go through this off-site alternative per year.

There are no attendance requirements for these young mothers in recognition of the difficult balance between school work and parenting. Students have the flexibility of choosing morning, afternoon, or full-day schedules, and some who are involved in other activities may come in only a few days per week. There is also provision for home study for those students who are unable to attend class for any reason. Students work on courses from their assessed skill level up to Grade 10 independently and at their own pace with an educational goal of completing Grade 10. There is a daycare on site, run by the Elizabeth Fry Society, which partners with TMAP in various ways to provide support services to the students.

Students at TMAP receive a lot of support from staff members, who advocate on their behalf and act as their liaison with the community. Students are encouraged to find a track and make plans that they can follow through in order to be more successful in their own lives. The classroom is laid out and equipped to accommodate students' children. Infants in the on-site daycare facility join their mothers for lunch provided by the program. TMAP provides transportation to and from class for its students.

Transitional Alternative Programs

Transitional Alternative Programs (TAPS) is administered by PGSS and is located on the community college campus. It currently serves 72 students and has 6 staff members: three teachers and three youth and family workers. The program is for students 17 years of age who have not been successful in traditional (or even alternate) schools or who have reached

17 years of age and so can no longer stay on in junior alternatives. Students coming into TAPS must be able to show that they are able to work at a minimum Grade 10 level.

In general, this program puts students on a graduation track. Most work towards an adult graduation certificate and a few work towards regular graduation. Classes are delivered all day in two-hour time slots between 8:30 a.m. and 6:50 p.m. and students are expected to attend a minimum of two hours every weekday. Most subjects are self-directed, but Social Sciences and English 11 and 12 have two-hour teacher-directed tutorials. TAPS also offers two- to four-week work experience or apprenticeship placements to students interested in personal or career development. Successful students have access to PGSS for electives if they are interested.

The expectation at TAPS is that students should be treated like, and behave as, adults. Its location on the college campus reinforces this expectation by changing students' peer group and making them more accountable for their own behaviour. There are youth care workers available all day, every school day. Students are expected to take full advantage of staff to help meet educational goals. Staff work to create a sense of community within the program through the food program, gift exchanges, physical education, graduation ceremonies, and open houses.

Skill Support

Skill Support is a junior educational enhancement available to students at PGSS who have not been successful in Grade 8 and are not expected to be successful in Grade 9. Participants are referred to Skill Support at the end of Grade 8 by teachers or counsellors as a result of academic assessment. There are five teachers and one aboriginal teaching assistant who divide the approximately 60 students for case management purposes but work with them collectively. Students arrive at Skill Support with very low literacy skills because they have been disconnected from school physically, emotionally, or socially or have some learning difficulties.

This is a half-day program during which students are out of their regular classroom. They work on individualized programs in a more personalized setting, focusing on Math and English. Some students may spend the other half of the day in regular classes doing electives or other academics. Others may just attend the half day in Skill Support. Staff motivate students towards success by tailoring expectations to the individual, recognizing success, and encouraging role modelling and home involvement where possible.

VANCOUVER TECHNICAL SECONDARY SCHOOL

Vancouver Technical Secondary School is one of Vancouver's largest inner city schools, serving grades 8 to 12. It has about 1,900 students, and approximately 140 of these are from First Nations. Five initiatives were visited at this school.

Career Preparation

Career Preparation provides an opportunity for interested students to combine classroom theory with practical experience. This option is offered to students in grades 11 and 12 who wish to explore a career of their choice before they move on to post-secondary education or

the world of work. About 350 students at Vancouver Technical take advantage of this opportunity and represent a cross-section of students' interest and abilities.

Students in career preparation must complete a six-course package in their specialty area. Three of the courses are common to all students enrolled in the program. Another two courses are chosen that relate directly to the program. The package also includes a minimum of 100 hours of work experience as one full credit.

Career preparation is intended to allow students to make sound and realistic decisions about their future and to develop skills essential to the workplace such as communication, decision making, organization, and co-operation.

The Nova Program

The Nova program started as an initiative of Vancouver Technical Secondary School to help students in grades 8 and 9 who were at risk of dropping out of school. Later, higher grades were incorporated. Students are usually referred to Nova by teachers via counsellors and are accepted into Nova following an intake process. Staff comprise two teachers, two youth and family workers, and an alternate program worker who serve 50 students.

Nova is a half-day program, which makes it attractive for students who are losing interest in school or who cannot make it to school for the full day, such as those in paid work. Class groups are small — 25 in the morning and 25 in the afternoon — working with four staff, which makes it easier to give individual attention. Nova offers only core academic subjects. No electives can be taken within the program. In a flexible approach to studies, students are given work they can succeed in if they are at an instruction level lower than their grade. Assessment is continuous rather than tied to yearly deadlines. The aim is for students to complete Grade 12 or complete Grade 10 and go on to vocational training.

The setting is more informal than the traditional classroom. Staff are chosen who are motivated to work with students of varying backgrounds and who are experienced with working with this population. There is a lot of time spent problem solving, teaching life skills and social responsibility, and building individual rapport and a sense of trust with youth. Field trips are a feature of the program to encourage team building and engage students in their subjects. They are offered lunch and a snack at their break as well as given bus tickets. Those who attend class consistently earn bus passes or other rewards for attendance.

Spectrum Senior Alternative

Spectrum is a district program for students in senior secondary who are at risk of not graduating. It is administered by Vancouver Technical and located on the school grounds. Five full-time teachers and two counsellors are available to serve about 83 students a year who want to graduate but have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out. These students are judged to have made poor educational choices due to poor parenting, poverty, or other family problems.

Working on a semester system, Spectrum provides both academic subjects and electives to its students. They do four subjects a day — two academic and two electives — instead of eight per day in the regular school. These longer classes are intended to maintain student interest in their subjects. Instruction is provided in smaller classroom settings, which facilitates relationship building: students are known to staff quickly. In order to graduate

students need 13 courses. They can choose to stay at Spectrum after three semesters and take the minimum three courses or they can study one last course in adult education. All students who complete three semesters participate in graduation ceremonies.

Spectrum aims to facilitate success through accountability with consequences. Staff keep closer track of absenteeism than is possible in the regular school due to student numbers. Counsellors are available and accessible for dealing with personal problems that may hinder success. There is no integration into the mainstream, which is important for students who may be anxious about being in a large school.

Sunrise Junior Alternative

This is a district program for students in grades 9 and 10, usually aged 15 and 16, who have disengaged from school in the transition from Grade 7 to Grade 8. They have become bored or find themselves overwhelmed or simply behind because they have missed classes and lack the skills to recover their grade. About 30 students take the program every year, with two teachers for core subjects and two youth and family workers who teach electives as well as provide counselling.

This program includes Art, physical fitness, and additional tutorials. Flexibility is incorporated into almost all areas of the program. For example, students are given credit for past terms and can negotiate attendance requirements to suit their circumstances. Classes are shorter than in the mainstream and are taught creatively to capture the attention of students with short attention spans. Success for students is defined in terms of credit for courses taught and increases in self-esteem, reflected in choices made both in and out of school.

Sunrise students may be put on an attendance contract where attendance has been a problem for them in the mainstream. Those who renege on their contract face consequences that may lead to them losing their place in the program. This system of consequences is tempered by rewards for meeting attendance requirements and by the care that is taken to build staff–student relationships. The program includes outings and overnight camping trips. After Sunrise, students may go on to the senior alternative, back to the mainstream, or complete education through adult education.

Tumanos

Tumanos is a district program for First Nations students in grades 8, 9, and 10. It is described as a cultural enrichment program, enrolling 29 of the school's 140 First Nations students. Tumanos is staffed by two full-time teachers, a youth and family worker, and an alternate program worker.

Core subjects are provided in individual self-paced modules, supplemented by cultural activities, First Nations Art, and other electives. Cultural and academic field trips and traditional ceremonies are incorporated as part of the processes of learning. Students tend to stay within the program through grades 8 to 10 and the aim is for them to re-enter the mainstream program in Grade 11.

Tumanos maintains a strong bond for students with one or two teachers, which mirrors more closely the elementary school experience and eases the transition into secondary school. Mid-morning snack and lunch is provided for students as well as bus fares. Staff

work to create responsible independent learners, to provide cultural enrichment opportunities, and to support students socially and emotionally so that they will stay in school.

TOTAL EDUCATION

This school was established in 1969 as a response to students dropping out of school. It was modelled after the Free Universities in the US. It serves 100 students in grades 11 and 12 who would likely not continue in school within the traditional system because of academic, emotional, or social difficulties.

The school takes students from all over the Vancouver school district between the ages of 15 and 18 who have completed Grade 10 and are motivated to complete Grade 12. Academic and non-academic subjects leading to British Columbia Secondary School Graduation Certificate are offered, in a semester system. Instruction at Total Education is tailored to meet the needs and abilities of individual students.

This alternative offers a more informal environment, more counselling support, and smaller class sizes than the mainstream schools. Students are on first-name basis with staff members. With three counsellors in the school, there is more opportunity for one-on-one counselling than these students would typically experience. Smaller class sizes help to foster relationships, and an emphasis on the individual makes students feel accepted as part of the community. Staff work as a team to facilitate success for students. Graduation is recognized as not only an academic achievement, but also as a symbol of personal focus.

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