The Cost of a School Day

Report from the Hamilton Community of Practice for the Knowledge Network of Student Wellbeing

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1.0 Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the youth who participated in “The Cost of the School Day” focus groups. Your trust in the process and openness to sharing your experiences and everyday realities made this research possible.

Youth focus groups were held throughout the city and we would like to extend a special thanks to the service providers who both promoted and hosted these groups. In an effort to maintain the confidentiality of the youth who participated, we have not included the names of these organizations.

We are appreciative of the ongoing contribution of our adult key informants and steering committee members who assisted with methodology, data analysis, and recommendations (listed in Appendix L). The accompanying monograph was designed by Yvonne Kelly who served as Lead Coordinator on behalf of the Social Planning Network of Ontario. Thank you, Yvonne for your support and patience in this process.

Thank you to the Hamilton Community Foundation for supporting this project with a funding grant.

Finally, this research was initiated as part of a community of practice of the Social Planning Network of Ontario's Knowledge Network of Student Well-being and as such, has been a community-led initiative. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton would like to thank Judith Bishop for her leadership in the local efforts of this provincial project. Judith is a former trustee and chair of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and continues to be a tireless advocate for children and education in Hamilton and beyond. Thank you for the many roles you fulfilled pulling together such rich information to build on this final report.
2.0 Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of the up front and hidden financial costs associated with a high school education as they relate to nine impact areas.

Methods of analysis included: youth focus groups and key respondent focus groups. Participant comments are noted in the Appendices.

Results of the project show that there are costs associated with various aspects of the school day which disproportionately create disadvantages for low-income students. A wide range of areas are affected by student poverty, limiting access to programs, instruction, athletic and other cultural activities, and creating negative implications for attendance and achievement.

The report finds that in order to address the identified additional needs and barriers facing youth from low-income families, school boards and governments need adequate policies that support equity for low income youth as well as additional resources to implement policy changes.

Key Recommendations

The report recommends schools and school boards annually examine their equity and inclusion practices and policies and apply an equity lens to the provision of human and other resources to schools. Anti-bullying policies need to be alert to income-based bullying and stigma and all policies should have specific, measurable, attainable and relevant indicators. Schools and school boards should report annually on their success at meeting their measured targets. The need to review food procurement, fundraising and community use of school policies is also mentioned.

This report recognizes that there is a need for improved funding that acknowledges the additional needs that youth from low income families face in schools, and to help remove some of the barriers they encounter. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education provide School Boards with enhanced funding for this purpose (such as an improved Learning Opportunity Grant). Additional funding is recommended for the transportation of low-income students, menstrual hygiene products, laundry facilities, and to ensure access to athletics and extra-curricular events, cultural interpreters, support staff and timely psychometric testing.

At the local level we identify that schools and school boards need to work more closely with community partners to support low income youth and their families.

At a Federal level, it is recommended that a National School Food Program be implemented in all schools.
3.0 Introduction

“They make you think school is free but it is not!”

The Cost of the School Day is a qualitative community consultation project aimed to identify the barriers high school youth from low income families face that prevent their full participation in school activities and instruction.

This project aims to answer the following:

- How do education policies and school practices impact on their participation?
- What changes to education policies are needed to reduce or remove stigma, exclusion or disadvantage for youth from low income families?

Arising out of the efforts of the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) to develop the Ontario Knowledge Network for Student Well Being (KNSWB), this work is a collaboration between local education advocate and champion, Judith Bishop and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC). The project is focused on Equity and Inclusive Education for Student Well-Being for students from low-income families. The project is part of Hamilton’s work to:

- build a body of evidence regarding education and equity issues as it relates to economics and class
- develop tools to better inform our community and educators and
- commit to action that will promote awareness of these issues and implement change where needed

Youth and key informants were asked to identify points throughout the school day where costs place pressure on family budgets and lead to unequal access to opportunities. Specifically, youth were asked about what costs families face in nine areas:

2. Travelling to School  5. School Trips  8. Homework

This project is in part based on another study, “The Cost of the School Day” that was developed by the Scottish Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Glasglow, Scotland and was published in 2015.

The report documents the views of 35 youth ages 16 and over, gathered from 5 focus groups and indicates that youth coming from low-income families face both open and hidden barriers to their full participation in schools. They reported on the school practices that they found helpful and made suggestions for change. Youth participants’ experience demonstrated the need to change current policy and practices and key adult informants provided recommendations for action at the school, school board, Provincial and Federal government levels.
4.0 Methodology

Replicating aspects of the methodology from a study out of Glasgow, Scotland, developed by the Scottish Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), youth and service providers were asked to identify points throughout the school day where costs place pressure on family budgets and lead to unequal access to opportunities.\(^1\)

Thirty-five youth ages 16 and over participated in the focus groups. At the time, all were residing in Hamilton. Students came from a variety of backgrounds including but not limited to youth with lived experience of homelessness, newcomers, Indigenous and racialized youth. Most, but not all students had attended school in Hamilton. Discussions took place in youth community organizations such as homework clubs and recreation centres in low-income neighbourhoods.

Youth were asked about the costs students face at school using a case study story developed from the example in Glasgow. The case history is attached as Appendix A.

All youth focus groups were asked the same questions and met for approximately one hour. A case history approach was used for discussion so that youth did not have to identify their individual circumstances. The identity of the youth who participated, as well as the organizations that assisted the project by advertising to youth, will remain confidential. Any identifying information gathered from focus group participants remains confidential and consent forms were shredded at the end of May 2019. Each youth participant received a small honorarium for their time.

One focus group was also completed with service providers (key respondents) which included educators, public health and social service providers. They were asked questions which paralleled those asked of the youth participants regarding costs of the school day. They were also asked to comment on what needs to be done to remove financial barriers to students and level the playing field.

The recommendations of this report were developed from youth and adult focus groups and key adult respondents who also utilized their professional and personal experience working with youth populations.

Limitations

The report acknowledges that the methodology and analysis utilized has limitations. Some of the limitations include: the youth sample size used. In some cases, it would have been beneficial to have had additional follow-up with youth participants to delve more deeply into issues that were raised. In addition, sessions were limited to one recorder and were not tape recorded, which may have limited the richness of the youth findings that were detailed.

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\(^{1}\) (Scottish Child Poverty Action Group, 2015)
5.0 Key Findings

5.1 Getting Dressed for School

**YOUTH VOICES**

“Uniforms are expensive.”

“I am shy to go and get clothes from the clothing closet.”

“If you want to fit in, [you] must wear brand name clothing.”

“Need shoes for gym otherwise [you] had to sit out…came in sandals and couldn’t participate.”

“Some students are wearing the same clothes every day. Some classrooms smell.”

“Families can’t afford them [tampons].”

Clothing is important to youth for many reasons as it reflects status and is used to create a sense of identity and connection among peers. When getting ready for school each morning, students are faced with costs the moment they start getting dressed.

**What We Heard**

Some students prefer the simplicity of uniforms as they are inclusive and can help prevent bullying of those without expensive or designer label clothes because, “if you want to fit in, [you] must wear brand name clothing.” Others find that the cost of a uniform can be just as pricey as buying regular clothes, especially when the styles of uniform change every few years, leaving hand-me-downs out of date.

Access to laundry facilities is an issue for students regardless of whether or not they attend schools that require a uniform. This poses an issue if a family does not have access to laundry facilities, which led youth to identify that, “some students are wearing the same clothes every day” and as a result, “some classrooms smell.” The stigma that students face having to wear clothes for longer periods between washings, can therefore create an additional stigma and isolation.

Some classes, such as physical education classes, require additional clothing items. One student said that they, “need shoes for gym otherwise [you] had to sit out…came in in sandals and couldn’t participate.” Many schools have attempted to combat the issue of clothing costs by providing a ‘clothing closet’ that students may access when they need something, which they agreed were helpful. These aim to fill the needs that parents may not be able to afford, specifically with respect to winter jackets, winter boots, or mandatory running shoes for gym class. Yet even when such resources exist in the school, it may be uncomfortable for students to access these services. One student noted, “I am shy to go and get clothes from the clothing closet.” Another said he had never seen or heard of anyone using this resource at his school.
While pads and tampons may not be considered typical clothing items, they are still a necessary requirement for female students to ensure a productive school day. Youth voiced that feminine hygiene machines in school washrooms were sometimes broken or had run out of supplies, making reliance on school purchased products, inconsistent. One student mentioned her school had been trying to offset costs of menstrual hygiene products by providing them in change rooms or in gym classes, as “families can’t afford them.” In this respect, they identified that inability to afford menstrual products was a significant barrier to regular school attendance. A Canadian study found that one third of women under the age of 25 reported struggling to afford menstrual products and 70% of students reported missing school due to having their period.²

**What Would Help?**

Students believed that the schools should host fundraisers to benefit students, using money to cover costs for expensive items such as proper footwear or weather-appropriate clothing. They also agreed that clothing closets should have a variety of sizes for everyone, and should be free. In addition to this, they felt that laundry facilities should be accessible for students to use during and after school. Youth further identified that clothing closets were helpful, yet also posed barriers as there was stigma attached to visiting the school clothes closet.

Female students were also in favour of improved access to menstrual products in schools. Respondents identified that school boards could follow the lead of the New Westminster School Board in British Columbia, Thames Valley District School Board in London Ontario and the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), all of which voted to provide free menstrual products for high school students. Following the example initiated by the New Westminster School Board, British Columbia became the first Canadian province to mandate free menstrual products in all public schools inclusive of elementary, middle and high schools.

Key informants indicated that increasing access to onsite laundry facilities after school for student use could help students. Where uniforms are worn, they suggested that they be of high quality to allow for longer wear; uniforms be consistent, without frequent style changes and that uniform exchanges be set up. They further added that where appropriate, some flexibility in required footwear would be beneficial.

**Recommendations for School Boards:**

1. Provide schools with free menstrual hygiene products for students.
2. Provide high schools with accessible laundry facilities, available after school hours, and accessible for individual student use.

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² (Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis, 2018)
5.2 Travelling to School

**YOUTH VOICES**

“I can’t afford to go to another school.”

“I have to do cleaning and cooking so I come late to school and miss school work.”

“I get to school late as bus connections are late.”

What We Heard

School Board policies and practices vary when it comes to assistance provided to students to get to school. There is no standard transportation policy in Ontario, but according to the Education Act, school boards can require high school students to walk up to 4.8 kilometers to school. School Boards through transportation consortiums, provide some transportation free of charge to eligible students. There is variation amongst Boards on how far students must walk to a school bus pick up point, how long they spend on the bus and the distance they must live from school to be eligible for free transportation. Safety features, such as the lack of pedestrian sidewalks and traffic flow, may also be considerations in providing transportation. Special Education students generally receive special considerations for transportation.

Families living on a low income may not own or have access to a vehicle, therefore they cannot drive their children to school. In urban areas, families may also find paying for bus fares expensive. These factors may contribute to students from low income families being late or missing school.

Lack of transportation may also limit the choices of high schools that students of low income families can attend. They are often limited to schools that are within walking distance or to which free transportation is provided.

There are differences between rural and urban school boards. Urban areas have sidewalks, which means that youth can be expected to walk further in safe walking conditions. Urban areas also have local transit which then allows boards to provide eligible students with free bus tickets for use on local transit, rather than utilizing a yellow school bus. In addition, urban boards may provide additional free bus tickets to some students in schools within low income neighborhoods who do not qualify for free transportation, but must still walk several kilometers each way.

While these policies are helpful, they do not address the fact that these students may not be adequately dressed for walking in winter conditions, or may not be able to afford bus fare. Some youth who have had to rely on public transit, noted that they have been late for school due to buses being late or having poor transfer connections that take additional time. Generally, rural students are bused to school.

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3 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011)
Individual school board policies may lead to confusion for students when they live near another student who receives free transportation. They may be told they do not qualify, living just below the cut-off distance for transportation, or do not meet other criteria.

Another issue raised by youth is the impact of having additional family responsibilities. Families with low income may require older children to undertake household chores and/or care for and supervise younger siblings. When older children are responsible for taking younger children to and from elementary school, this may impact their ability to arrive to school on time.

Youth may also be acting as caretakers for their parents or guardians with physical disabilities, mental health or other issues. In England, a survey of young carers, (youth who were caring for an adult) noted that these youth had an average of 48 school days that were either missed or cut short. All of these situations may contribute to youth being late for school and missing instruction and may, therefore, result in suspension from the school, leading to further loss of instruction time.

Youth in our focus group noted, “I can’t afford to go to another school.” While youth living in moderate or high income families can consider attending any school allowed by Board policy, youth from low income families whose families cannot provide transportation or afford bus fare must attend a school within walking distance or where they can access free transportation. This may mean that youth from low-income families are restricted in their choices of high schools and academic programs.

Research suggests that unstable housing can lead to frequent moves and disrupts students’ attendance. If a move results in being outside the catchment of their previous school, students must change schools, leading to possible disruption of teachings. Although schools might consider their continued attendance, when families relocate outside of their school catchment boundary, these youths may have to change schools because they are no longer eligible for school bus transportation to their former school. Changing schools at the high school level is also often disruptive for youth, in terms of losing friends and missing instruction.

**What Would Help?**

Youth involved in this project stated that free bus passes, including increased accessibility to school bus transportation would be a helpful intervention to improve their access to school. Improvements to service were noted as a suggestion for change; in response to youth being late for school due to city transit schedules that do not always coordinate transfer times. Youth also noted that school boards should take into consideration the length of time it takes a student to get to school, not just the distance from the school.

Key informants indicated that schools should consider alternatives to punishment for students who are habitually late or absent because of family responsibilities. It was also suggested that schools maintain a register of students who have family responsibilities, including jobs that impact their schooling so that teachers can make adjustments and offer flexibility where needed.

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4 (Carers Trust, 2019)  
5 (British Columbia Teachers Federation, 2016b)
It was expressed that partnerships between school boards and their local transit companies may provide opportunities for better services and cheaper fares for youth.

**Recommendations for the Ministry of Education:**

1. Require School Attendance Officers to create registers of students caring for adults and family members, and require consideration of these registers in Provincial school attendance audits.
2. Provide additional transportation funds for pupils from low income families to prevent disruption of schooling.

**Recommendations for School Boards:**

3. Maintain strong relationships with local bus services to improve transportation for youth, including how students are treated on buses.
4. Work with local transit authorities to provide free or reduced student bus cards.
5. Provide additional funding for bus tickets, where local transit exists, for those students from low income families who do not qualify for school transportation but cannot afford bus tickets.
6. Schedule high school start times and bus pick-up times later than their elementary feeder schools to accommodate high school students who need to drop off and pick up their younger siblings.

### 5.3 Learning at School

**YOUTH VOICES**

“If you don't have the equipment when you come to school, the teacher would treat you really poorly”

“If you don’t have Wi-Fi, they’ll be angry”

“Having access to a computer is a big one; given one to three hours in the library at tops, and if can’t do work there, teachers don’t want the work handwritten”

“Teachers pay for things with their own money”

**What We Heard**

Youth reported that they are expected to provide supplies needed at school, which are expensive. The Ontario Ministry of Education policy stipulates the conditions when a school fee can be charged, but does not address what items must be provided free. The Ontario Ministry of Education expects school boards to have policies related to school fees and fundraising on their websites.

Despite the increased reliance on technology in schools, nearly half of Canadian households earning less than $30,000 do not have access to the internet. As a result, they may not be able to access the internet at home for research.

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6 (Statistics Canada, 2012; Government of Canada, 2018)
Youth expressed that these are common expectations that teachers have for students. One youth noted “[I] did not have use of Wi-Fi at night, but I needed to have it.” In addition, when the expectation of schools is that work is to be completed online at home, handwritten work may not be acceptable and students’ grades may suffer as a consequence. This places youth from low-income families at a disadvantage and may affect their achievement in course work.

Youth commented that when they are unable to meet the requirements due to lack of resources, most notably access to internet and computers, they experienced a lack of understanding from their teachers. They said teachers would be angry with them, or frustrated as a result.

The Connecting Families initiative is a Liberal government program which provides $13.2 million to deliver internet access to low-income families for $10 a month and provides up to 50,000 free computers. While this offers some assistance, the program doesn’t allow families to self-apply, but rather eligible families are selected to participate in the program, meaning that only a select number of youth will benefit.7

Key respondents were aware that School Boards may not always equitably allocate their resources to schools in areas of high poverty, and faced with the high degree of need, these schools may not be able to offer the same supports students may receive if living in an area with low needs. Research from the United States of America, demonstrates that equitably resourcing schools can positively affect student achievement. A study out of California found that increased spending in districts serving large proportions of students in poverty led to increased high school achievement and graduation rates; indicating that “money targeted to students’ needs can make a significant difference in student outcomes and can narrow achievement gaps.”8

Some school boards allocate a fixed number of psychological assessments per school, regardless of the school’s need. In a 2019 survey of publicly funded Ontario schools, 53% of secondary schools reported that there are restrictions on the number of students who can be assessed each year.9 There is some evidence from Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) data that special education needs are higher in schools with a predominance of families with low incomes. Parents who have low income are at a disadvantage, as they generally cannot afford to finance private psychological testing and are unlikely to have private insurance that covers the cost. This may mean that these students may wait longer for psychological testing which may delay access to appropriate academic interventions. Furthermore, they may never receive an exceptional student designation under the Education Act. This is required if they continue on to post-secondary education.

Key respondents also highlighted that schools can have lower expectations of students from low-income backgrounds. In Ontario, applied and locally developed courses in high schools are predominately filled by students from lower income families. “Research by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) that follows students over time

7 (Connecting Families, 2018)
8 (Johnson and Tanner, 2018, p. i)
9 (People for Education, 2019)
shows that students with comparable academic backgrounds (i.e. similar scores, even poor scores, on grade 6 tests) are more likely to do better in academic than applied courses. Other research has found that students in applied courses are much less likely to graduate from high school.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, even though applied courses are intended to lead to college, workplace, and apprenticeships, only 37\% of students in an applied program of study are accepted into college”.\textsuperscript{11} Fewer youth from low income families go on to college or university. It is important that schools examine their instructional practices to determine whether they are perpetuating student inequities in attainment. One youth in our study asked for a “proper education.” Are they receiving one?

\textbf{What Would Help?}

The young people in our focus groups identified actions that would help minimize these barriers to learning, which include: free school supplies, a supply exchange and flexibility to complete assignments requiring computers and/or internet in class. They added that they would like pen and paper assignments to be accepted by teachers, advanced notice to complete computer-based assignments and additional locations to complete their homework. Youth also commented on the curriculum itself, noting that “school boards need to teach people actual skills that you need in life (taxes, budgeting, cooking, sewing).” Another youth thought there should be a focus on family studies and other practical skills and that these should be mandatory.

Key informants identified that increasing access to school libraries for homework and creating a resource list which outlines places in the city where youth can access free Wi-Fi services would offer practical solutions for youth. They also identified additional recommendations that went beyond the issues raised by youth which included addressing well known systemic barriers to learning. Suggestions included encouraging schools to examine the number of low income students that are taking applied or locally developed programs and develop a plan to academically boost these students and also to increase student access to post-secondary schools by inviting colleges and universities into schools.

\textit{Recommendations for School Boards:}

1. Work with school superintendents and managers to ensure that school improvement plans are developed to include specific targets related to student barriers to achieving equitable outcomes.

\textit{Recommendations for Individual Schools:}

2. Examine the number of low income students taking applied or locally developed programs and develop a plan to academically boost these students.

\textsuperscript{10} (Brown & Tam, 2017a; People for Education, 2015 as cited in People for Education, 2019)

\textsuperscript{11} (Brown & Tam, 2017b as cited in People for Education, 2019)
5.4 Friendships at School

**YOUTH VOICES**

“Friends give you food when you have none”
“Going out to eat with your friends you gotta have a few bucks”
“Feel shame if can’t go (to dances) because of the expense”

**What We Heard**

Friends are an important source of support. Youth commented that in order to have friends, they needed to have some money to go out together, or to have a cell phone to fit in or else they may feel left out. Groups of youth may exclude those who appear to have less money, and this may cause bullying.

**What Would Help?**

Youth had no comments or suggestions regarding what they found useful or how these issues could be addressed. Key informants suggested that schools host free events which offer opportunities for youth to make and maintain friendships and examine anti-bullying policies and practices annually to ensure that each school is alert to income-based bullying and stigma.

**Recommendations for Individual Schools:**

1. Annually examine equity and inclusion practices while ensuring that anti-bullying policies are alert to income-based bullying and stigma as well as having specific, measurable, attainable and relevant indicators.
2. Examine with their own students, parents and staff the cost of the school day in their school community and relate their findings to their equity policies and anti-bullying practices.
5.5 School Trips

**YOUTH VOICES**

“A lot of trips cost money”
“Once or twice a month”
“Some teachers helped out with funding for long trips”

**What We Heard**

The youth in our focus groups indicated that school trips can be expensive. According to The Ontario Ministry of Education policy, “a fee charge shall be permissible for an activity, material, course or program if it is: not required as part of the regular day school program, voluntary, and/or alternatives are offered, non-essential or extracurricular in nature and is not required for graduation by an individual student, or a voluntary upgrade or substitute of a more costly material to the material provided for course purposes.” In other words, trips required as part of a course of study must be provided free of cost. The Ontario Ministry of Education expects school boards to have policies related to school fees and fundraising on their websites.

School Trips are commonly financed through fees from parents, as well as from grants from arts and environmental agencies, school budgets, School Boards’ own foundations (where they exist), community agencies and school fundraisers. Youth mentioned that teachers have also been known to fund school trips, allowing all students to participate. One youth indicated “the teacher paid for [the] trip to Canada’s Wonderland.”

**What Would Help?**

While youth suggested fundraisers as a solution to the cost of school trips, and for other needed items such as school supplies and clothing, there is evidence that schools in low income neighborhoods raise less money from fundraisers than those in wealthier areas. On average, schools in high socio-economic areas (with higher parental levels of education and higher family incomes) fundraise twice as much as schools in low socio-economic areas perpetuating inequities. Fundraising also puts further stress on those families who cannot afford to contribute. All schools and school boards have fundraising policies.

Key informants suggested that schools promote fundraisers that do not promote asking families for money such as community car washes.

**Recommendation for School Boards:**

1. Examine fundraising policies to ensure they are being followed, and that schools with a predominance of low income families, are not disadvantaged.

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13 (People for Education, 2019)
14 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2)
5.6 Eating at School

YOUTH VOICES

“Can’t function properly if no nutrition during the school day”
“School lunch is expensive; pizza place is cheaper”
“…ashamed if don’t have money for school lunch”

What We Heard

Access to sufficient, affordable, nutritious food was a big topic with youth and they indicated that when they don’t have adequate access to healthy food it can and does affect their learning. It was noted that youth from the same school were not all aware of the free food services, or other services available.

School Boards provide cafeteria services for their students and therefore have a role in monitoring and ensuring the quality and appropriateness of food offered. In high schools, many School Boards contract out cafeteria services to companies, sometimes being provided a percentage of the profits for school purposes. Occasionally, students within the school provide food through hospitality classes. In addition, high needs schools find charitable and other sources for breakfast programs and free lunch programs.

Canada is one of the few developed countries in the world that does not have a National School Food Program. Providing nutritious food at school can improve achievement. “Researchers have concluded from a Quebec study that school food supplementation is a moderating factor in the association between household food insecurity and scholastic difficulties for adolescents.”

What Would Help?

Students would like to see free hot lunches available at their schools, especially ones that are nutritious, have vegetables and meet religious requirements. They further suggested a continuation of classroom breakfast programs similar to those available in many elementary schools, which are available to all students and therefore reduce stigmas.

Key informants suggested that high schools could provide cheaper food made in-house by students during hospitality classes. Schools should monitor free nutrition programs on their premises to see that they respect cultural and religious practices.

Recommendation for Federal Government:

1. Develop a National School Food Program

Recommendation for School Boards:

2. Examine procurement policies and directives with regard to the provision of food to maximize affordability, cultural appropriateness and nutritional value.

15 (Roustit et al., 2009 as cited in SPRC, 2010)
5.7 Fun Events

YOUTH VOICES

“Had to pay for dances”
“Feel shame if can’t go because of the expense”
“If friends go, it’s not so good if you are left out because you can’t afford it”

What We Heard

Youth identified that there are additional costs if students want to attend fun events like dances or graduations and again, there is a sense of shame if they are unable to attend because they cannot afford to pay these costs. Events like prom have additional costs for formal wear, cap, gown, tickets and transportation.

What Would Help?

Youth suggested that “principal(s) and teachers need to include all students in school events” and they thought that social events “didn’t need to be so expensive.” One youth noted that dances should be “open to everyone” regardless of cost.

Key informants suggested that schools examine their inclusion policies annually to make sure all students are included in school events/activities and that schools support programs for donated formal wear.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education:

1. Allocate additional school resources to schools with large populations of low-income students to remove the financial barriers to low-income students’ full participation in all school activities.

Recommendations for School Boards:

2. Annually examine and report on equity and inclusion practices, insure that their anti-bullying policies are alert to income-based bullying and stigma, and that all have specific, measurable, attainable and relevant indicators.

3. Provide an adequate budget for all school sports, arts and other extra-curricular activities so all can participate without a cost barrier.
5.8 Sports and Extra-Curricular Activities

What We Heard

There are many benefits for youth participation in school extracurricular activities. Research suggests positive influences on youth development and outcomes.\(^{16}\) However, youth incur additional costs when participating in sports and extracurricular activities.

People for Education report that seventy-eight per cent of secondary schools ask students to pay athletic fees between $1 to $1500, the average is $116.\(^{17}\) Evidence in Hamilton suggests there are large differences in funds raised for athletics between schools that have high needs students and schools with low needs students.\(^{18}\) $18 per student was raised for athletics in high schools with many low-income families, and $65 dollars per student was raised in low needs high schools. This suggests that income plays a big part in whether students participate in sports or other activities. The school experience for low income students is different than that for students with more income.

Youth mentioned the costs involved to participate in sports and extracurricular activities affected their participation. In fact, on the whole, youth in the focus groups were not involved in sports or extracurricular activities. Only two youth mentioned playing a sport, lacrosse and soccer.

School activity fees can occasionally offset some of the cost for extracurricular. Eighty-five per cent of secondary schools in Ontario have annual student activity fees where all students pay these fees which may be up to $300 per year, the average fee is $44.\(^{18}\) This is a burden for low-income families. These fees are sometimes used by schools to support the cost of athletic and extra-curricular activities which otherwise may not be possible to run in schools with many low-income youths. School Boards need to be sure that all students have access to sports and extracurricular activities.

What Would Help?

Youth again noted that school fundraising helps to alleviate some of the financial burden. They also indicated that “principals and teachers need to include all students in school events”, and that events “don’t need to be so expensive”.

\(^{16}\) (Feldman and Matjasko, 2005; Feldman and Matjasko, 2012)
\(^{17}\) People for Education 2019 p.40
\(^{18}\) (People for Education, 2019)
Key informants suggested that, in order to minimize costs for travel and tournaments, schools consider inviting high caliber sports teams to their school for exhibition games.

Recommendations for School Boards:

1. Provide an adequate budget for all school sports, arts and other extra-curricular activities so all students can participate without a cost barrier.

5.8 Homework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUTH VOICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“No quiet space to work at home.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Being asked to cook when [I] have a lot of assignments.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Did not have use of Wi-Fi at night, but need to have it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You have to go around the city to find help.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What We Heard

Students in the study indicated their desire for more homework support and resources. Teachers surveyed in British Columbia have indicated that, having flexibility with students who face barriers to completing homework was needed. Strategies that increase success for low-income students include when teachers use a non-judgmental approach and the ability to accommodate students. Other strategies highlighted included homework tutoring after school and having extra-curricular activities and programming for students of all ages; allowing youth with younger siblings the ability to attend coinciding programs.

Students from low-income families face multiple barriers to completing homework. Some barriers identified in youth focus groups included homes being crowded and noisy, and having no Wi-Fi and/or electricity services in the home.

There can be conflicts between school demands and the requirements to provide household support for the family. As one student explained, “focusing on school work may become a family issue,” as students with low-income parents may have greater responsibilities in the home while their parents are busy, however, “when mom asks for help, [you] can’t disobey her.” Another student mentioned that they were “being asked to cook when [I] have a lot of assignments.” This can be a complicated conflict for many students, as there is tension between the demands of school and family obligations.

When it comes to homework assistance, the focus groups felt this was a huge need not being met. Youth mentioned that the “public library is packed” and that “you might have to take a bus to go somewhere that has more staff available,” resulting in having to “go around the city to find help.”

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19 (British Columbia Teachers Federation, 2016a)
There were concerns about the existing free tutoring programs being oversubscribed since private tutoring is so expensive, but “those places are too packed to get the tutoring.”

**What Would Help?**

Youth welcomed programs that provided afterschool access to help them complete work after school. In this respect, the services at the public library were particularly appreciated. Youth also made mention of helpful homework supports through programs provided after school by school clubs through the school, and with the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre and YMCA.

Partnerships with community agencies are seen as very important by key informants in broadening the supports that can be provided to youth, especially those from low-income families. They recognized the need for “warm and safe places for Wi-Fi, charging phones and with computers for youth.” Schools can advertise where students can get access to free Wi-Fi and homework support; provide access to the school after hours especially to school libraries, and work closely with their public library. Schools can foster partnerships with community agencies including those running summer camps. Youth also appreciated the after school programs made available by agencies and wanted more. Providing assets to support youth have been noted by many as important in building resiliency.

*Recommendation for School Boards:*

1. Foster relationships and enhance partnership agreements with public libraries, local and regional governments, community agencies serving children and youth, and post-secondary institutions.
5.9 Attitudes Towards Poverty

**YOUTH VOICES**

“Students are not willing to come forward, students are shy; they are made fun of and bullied”

“Help with home life is the bigger issue; families can’t pay bills, no electricity, no shower”

**What We Heard**

School is challenging, but coping with poverty adds another layer of complexity for students. Assumptions and bias regarding poverty contribute to the difficulties faced by many youths. All schools are required to have Equity and Anti-Bullying policies in place and these policies require school staff and administrators to confront their own classism, bias and assumptions about poverty. As such, they have the potential to provide a necessary support to youth living in low income families.

Schools located in low income areas have, in the past, received additional Provincial funding to pay for additional resources for the school. This would include items such as extra bus tickets, additional social work support, nutritional programs, child and youth workers and other support staff. Extra funding has also been provided to school Boards through the Learning Opportunity Grants. Both sources of funds are essential in addressing some of the resource gaps experienced by youth from low-income families.

Over the course of our discussions, Youth raised the issue, in a variety of ways regarding the need to provide support to their families. One respondent stated, “Help with home life is the bigger issue; families can’t pay bills, no electricity, no shower.”

**What Would Help?**

Youth saw a greater role for school leadership to reach out to students “in need” and thought that teachers should be educated about the problems faced by students. Other suggestions put forward by youth included: petitioning the school and advocating for “more rights for low-income students.” There was also a call for greater inclusivity at school as one youth mentioned, “[The] principal and teachers need to include all students in school events.”

Key informants recognized that there were barriers which impeded schools’ ability to effectively engage parents and guardians with lower incomes. Because of lack of transportation or precarious employment, some could not easily get to schools or attend school appointments. Accessing school information, and making applications is often only possible through the internet, and some families do not have access to the internet. They further identified that schools are not always able to provide interpreter services for immigrant families.

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20 (SPNO, 2018)
21 (Hoffman, 2018)
Key informants also recognized there were many ways that schools could practically support students from low-income families. This could be accomplished by:

- advertising the supports available to students within their schools
- create systems so that youth and families do not have to ask for financial help
- minimizing or eliminating charges for all school related activities
- ensuring that there is consistent practice throughout the school to deal with issues which could be related to low income and poverty
- facilitating the collaboration of school social workers, school public health nurses, school settlement workers and other community agencies to support families
- schools should be informed of the supports that are available for families on social assistance

Key informants also recognized that School Boards cannot by themselves provide all the supports that youth and families from low-income families require, which means that partnerships with local agencies, city, and postsecondary institutions are important and necessary. Access to schools by community agencies should be welcomed, and community agencies serving low income youth should be prioritized over others in providing access to space for programs in schools.  

Recommendations were brought forward addressing school equity and inclusion policies and practices and increased family support.

*Recommendation for Ministry of Education:*

1. Ensure that additional resources are allocated to school boards to compensate for the additional costs of low income students.

*Recommendations for School Boards*

2. Examine the allocation of human and other resources to ensure schools with high concentrations of low-income students are equitably treated.
3. Provide schools in low-income areas with additional psychometric testing.
4. Foster relationships and enhance partnership agreements with public libraries, local and regional governments, community agencies serving children and youth, and post-secondary institutions.
5. Leverage existing relationships with community agencies in high priority areas to enhance and strengthen parent engagement and support opportunities.
6. Include the costs of cultural interpretation as an essential tool in those schools’ budgets who have newcomer families, or other families who do not speak the official languages.
7. Apply an equity lens in providing community access to school space before and after school.

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22 (Harris and Wilkes, 2013)
6.0 Recommendations

Recommendations were provided by the steering committee comprised of education advocates in Hamilton. The recommendations below reflect the committee’s synthesis of the focus group data with youth and key informants as well as the collective experience and expertise of the committee members.

**Federal Government**

1. Develop a National School Food Program.

**Ministry of Education**

2. Require School Attendance Officers to create registers of students caring for adults and family members, and require consideration of these registers in Provincial school attendance audits.

3. Provide additional transportation funds for pupils from low income families to prevent disruption of schooling.

4. Allocate additional school resources to schools with large populations of low-income students to remove the financial barriers to low-income students’ full participation in all school activities.

5. Ensure that additional resources are allocated to school boards to recognize the additional costs of low income students.

**School Boards**

6. Provide schools with free menstrual hygiene products for students.

7. Provide high schools with accessible laundry facilities, available after school hours, and accessible for individual student use.

8. Maintain strong relationships with local bus services to improve transportation for youth, including how students are treated on buses.

9. Work with local transit authorities to provide free or reduced student bus cards.

10. Provide additional funding for bus tickets, where local transit exists, for those students from low income families who do not qualify for school transportation but cannot afford bus tickets.

11. Schedule high school start times and bus pick up times later than their elementary feeder schools to accommodate high school students who need to drop off and pick up their younger siblings.
12. Work with school superintendents and managers to ensure that school improvement plans are developed to include specific targets related to student barriers to achieving equitable outcomes.

13. Examine the number of low income students taking applied or locally developed programs and develop a plan to academically boost these students.

14. Examine fundraising policies to ensure they are being followed, and that schools with a predominance of low income families are not disadvantaged.

15. Examine procurement policies and directives with regard to the provision of food to maximize affordability, cultural appropriateness and nutritional value.

16. Provide an adequate budget for all school sports, arts and other extra-curricular activities so all can participate without a cost barrier.

17. Foster relationships and enhance partnership agreements with public libraries, local and regional governments, community agencies serving children and youth, and post-secondary institutions.

18. Examine the allocation of human and other resources to ensure schools with high concentrations of low-income students are equitably treated.

19. Provide schools in low-income areas with additional psychometric testing.

20. Leverage existing relationships with community agencies in high priority areas to enhance and strengthen parent engagement and support opportunities.

21. Include the costs of cultural interpretation as an essential tool in those schools’ budgets who have newcomer families, or other families who do not speak the official languages.

22. Apply an equity lens in providing community access to school space before and after school.

**Individual Schools**

23. Annually examine and report on equity and inclusion practices and ensure that anti-bullying policies are alert to income-based bullying and stigma, and that all have specific, measurable, attainable and relevant indicators.

24. Examine with their own students, parents and staff the cost of the school day in their school community and relate their findings to their equity policies and anti-bullying practices.
7.0 Conclusion

“They make you think school is free but it is not!”  

Student

There are many up front and hidden costs at school for youth from low-income families. Youth in the focus group told the researchers that the school day is expensive. Some of these costs limit the choices students from low-income families can make about the school they attend. The lack of accessible transportation was a barrier identified by the both the youth in the focus group and the service providers’ focus group. Additional costs for extracurricular activities, school events and school trips also limited participation for youth from low-income families.

Students from low-income families may be subject to bullying and exclusion. They reported feeling left out of some events, and that they did not have enough access to food or the right clothing. The youth from the focus group identified friends as a social support, whom often shared their resources; however, the lack of funds also deterred some of those relationships.

The youth appreciated existing programs and practices which created inclusion in their schools. The youth identified community partnerships that provided internet access and homework support as beneficial. All schools can examine their practices and policies to see if there can be more equitable approaches for students from low-income families. Systemic changes are needed by school boards and the Ministry of Education so that all students, regardless of income, can participate fully in school.

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23 See Recommendations
8.0 References


9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Case History

Case Study Story and Overview of Questions
Mara is 14 years old and has just moved to this area [Hamilton] with her Mom and little brother Omar who is 3. Mara is about to start high school. She’s nervous because she doesn’t know what to expect. She wants to fit in and be happy. She hopes to make friends and that the teachers are nice. She hopes she’ll be able to do the work. Mara gets on pretty well with her family—well Omar is a bit of a pain sometimes but she likes him really. Her Mom is finding it difficult to get work. This means there isn’t a lot of money at home and sometimes Mara’s Mom is a bit stressed about paying bills and things like that. She quite often tells Mara that they can’t afford the things she wants such as clothes and a new phone.

What will cost Mara money at school?
There appeared to be eight main expense areas which rose to the top in each conversation about the costs Mara will be facing: transportation, food access, internet access, clothing, academics and learning, friendships, extra-curricular activities, and homework.

What are the big deals?
This question was asked in order to have the students rank the financial costs to the school day. Although it was a qualitative approach, the topics which received the most attention in length of discussion and perceived emotion were: transportation, food access, internet access, and clothing.

Who has power to change things?
All groups agreed the school boards and all levels of government had tools to change things. This is reflected in the direction of the recommendations.

What helps and what else needs to happen?
This question gave students an opportunity to identify solutions they have seen in place as well as ideas they have that could help.
### 9.2 Appendix B: Quotes from Focus Groups: Getting Dressed for School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Easier if all wear the same clothes and no-one is expensive&quot;</td>
<td>Clothing closets</td>
<td>&quot;Have fundraisers to benefit schools for things like proper footwear for youth&quot;</td>
<td>Every high school provide accessible laundry facilities, available after school hours, and these should be accessible for individual student use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Uniforms are expensive&quot;</td>
<td>Menstrual Sanitary Products: “Some schools had a girls’ only gym with supplies in them&quot;</td>
<td>Clothing closets need to keep clothing of the right sizes and it should be clean.</td>
<td>Schools choose uniforms from clothing that is of a high quality so that it can be handed down and will stand up to substantial wear and tear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Uniforms are inclusive&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Should be free footwear available&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Some people want new clothes every year, others don’t care&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tampon Machines in school washrooms need to be kept continuously supplied</td>
<td>That changes to uniforms be minimized so that uniforms can be passed on to siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;If want to fit in must wear brand name clothing,&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Free feminine sanitary products need to be available</td>
<td>Suppliers of uniforms and schools consider setting up exchanges for families where outgrown uniforms can be traded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Some students are wearing the same clothes every day. Some classrooms smell&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>As shoes are expensive, schools which have uniform rules consider flexible rules for footwear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am shy to go and get clothes from the clothing closet&quot;</td>
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</table>

### 9.3 Appendix C: Quotes from Focus Groups: Travelling to School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Consistency of provision of free bus tickets needed&quot;</td>
<td>Free bus passes being given out by schools</td>
<td>&quot;City buses should provide free bus service for youth : Need free student bus pass like the university students&quot;</td>
<td>That schools maintain a register of students who have family responsibilities, including jobs, that impact on their schooling so all staff know who these students are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Students need transportation for all kinds of things, so it needs to be more accessible&quot;</td>
<td>School bus transportation to eligible students</td>
<td>School should own its own bus</td>
<td>That schools consider alternatives to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton
The Cost of a School Day in Hamilton
"Can’t afford to go to another school"
"I have to do cleaning and cooking and so I come late to school, and miss school work"
"I get to school late as bus connections are late"
"I take two buses to get to school, if one bus is late then I miss the connection and I am late for school and miss instruction"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Schools give out a long list&quot;</td>
<td>Supplies being provided by the school or classroom teacher</td>
<td>&quot;Teachers need to show that they care.&quot;</td>
<td>Schools provide access to the library for homework purposes after school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A good calculator needed for good marks in calculus&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Some schools have school-issued iPad’s that you can sign out, but you’re expected to have Wi-Fi” at home.</td>
<td>&quot;Need free school bag with supplies as they got in elementary&quot;</td>
<td>Schools advertise where students can get access to free Wi-Fi and homework support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In Grade 11 need scientific calculator&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Other schools have tech in the class you can use but you couldn’t take it home with you&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Should be a supplies exchange, like a clothing exchange&quot;</td>
<td>Schools examine the number of low income students taking applied or locally developed programs and develop a plan to academically boost these students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you don’t have the equipment when you come to class, the teachers would treat you really poorly</td>
<td>&quot;Teachers pay for things with their own money.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Need to complete assignments in class if don’t have Wi-Fi or computer at home&quot;</td>
<td>Access from high school to postsecondary made easier Schools invite Colleges and Universities into the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It’s not right for a teacher to yell at someone because they don’t have a pencil and paper; feel depressed for others&quot;</td>
<td>Use of Library both in school and public library is helpful</td>
<td>&quot;The option of paper and pencil needs to be given to complete work&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;If you don’t have Wi-Fi they’ll be angry&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Want other options other than completing work online&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Youth Comments

1. “Did not have use of Wi-Fi at night, but need to have it”
2. “Expect everyone to have it”
3. “Get mad if say don’t”
4. “Want you to have computers: expected you to hand in your work online, and never had access for that”
5. “Having access to a computer is a big one; given one to three hours in the library at tops, and if can’t do the work there, teachers don’t want the work handwritten”
6. “Access to the Internet: schools assume you have Wi-Fi now”
7. “If lose or break the iPad the school provides” [must pay]
8. “Must pay if wish to print out more than two pages”

### Youth found helpful

- “Inform in advance that need work online; accept hand written work”
- “Give students more time to finish assignments in class.”
- Use the public library where there is access to Wi-Fi and computers.
- “iPads could be assigned to classrooms” “School provides free iPad”
- Teachers tell you where you get can work done after school
- “Need a proper education”
- “School board needs to teach people actual skills that you need in life (taxes, budgeting, cooking, sewing) Focus on family studies and other practical skills being mandatory”

### Youth suggestions for change

- “Inform in advance that need work online; accept hand written work”
- “Give students more time to finish assignments in class.”
- Use the public library where there is access to Wi-Fi and computers.
- “iPads could be assigned to classrooms” “School provides free iPad”
- Teachers tell you where you get can work done after school
- “Need a proper education”
- “School board needs to teach people actual skills that you need in life (taxes, budgeting, cooking, sewing) Focus on family studies and other practical skills being mandatory”

### Suggestions for schools from key informants

- That schools provide free events which offer opportunities to make friends.
## Youth Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Students are not willing to come forward, students are shy: they are made fun of and bullied”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>That schools examine regularly their equity and inclusion practices and ensure that their anti-bullying policies are alert to income-based bullying and stigma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Cell Phone] “need one to fit in”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Going out to eat with your friends, you’ve gotta have a few bucks”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Have hurt feelings if you don’t have money to go out with friends”</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Need stuff to make friends”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Feel shame if can’t go [to dances] because of the expense”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If friends go, it’s not so good if you are left out because you can’t afford it”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 9.6 Appendix F: Quotes from Focus Groups: School Trips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[There are big expensive trips] “like going to Barcelona”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A lot of trips cost money”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Once or twice a month”</td>
<td>“The Teacher paid for trip to Canada’s Wonderland”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consider alternatives “Have school trips inside the school e.g. raised butterflies inside the school” Fundraisers for field trips “fundraisers part of small businesses set up by students where people can get experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“$20 a trip”</td>
<td>“Some teachers helped out with funding for long trips”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Need] “Fundraisers for field trips”</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>That schools promote fundraisers that do not involve asking families for money e.g. car washes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 9.7 Appendix G: Quotes from Focus Groups: Eating at School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful:</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;extra money for sports games, dances, some clubs have associated costs (cheerleading you had to, but volunteering things are free)&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;School lunch is expensive: Pizza Place is cheaper&quot;</td>
<td>Free food available in lunch programs, breakfast programs, and through NYAWEH, school clubs, after school programs</td>
<td>&quot;Need more free food. “Breakfast programs: not given a whole lot to eat: juice, sandwiches, pizza&quot;</td>
<td>That High schools consider providing cheaper and more nutritious food produced in house by students during class hospitality courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I spend $10 a day on lunches&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Apple and cereal are provided at school early and are free&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Free food in elementary school came to the classroom: didn't have to go to a special room&quot;</td>
<td>Respect cultural and religious practices of the students in the food served in free nutrition programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Can't function properly if no nutrition during the school day&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Teacher in English Circle provides food as well as homework support&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Attended school in New York City and breakfast and lunch were provided free. Is a good investment&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ashamed if don’t have money for school lunch&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Friends give you food when you have none.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Need free hot lunches&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;cafeteria not good food&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Need vegetables, and food that meets religious requirements&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Replace the ham sandwiches and white bread in the free lunches, they are not halal&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9.8 Appendix H: Quotes from Focus Groups: Fun Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful:</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dances had to pay for&quot;</td>
<td>Fund raised in school to pay for indoor soccer</td>
<td>&quot;Principal and teachers need to include all students in school events&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Comments</td>
<td>Youth found helpful:</td>
<td>Youth suggestions for change</td>
<td>Suggestions for schools from key informants</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Feel shame if can’t go because of the expense&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;They (events) don’t need to be so expensive&quot;</td>
<td>Schools examine inclusion polices annually to make sure all students are included in school events and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;If friends go, it’s not so good if you are left out because you can’t afford it&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Should not have fancy events. The school should raise money for those who do not have the money to go&quot;</td>
<td>Schools support programs for donated formal wear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gown and cap had to be paid for&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Dances should be open to everyone regardless of cost&quot;</td>
<td>To minimize costs of travel and tournaments, schools consider inviting high calibre sports teams to their school for exhibition game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Graduation photos&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Had to buy Grad gowns&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;had to pay for the [prom] ticket&quot; [$60-$70]</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Need to get a Prom dress&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;book a limo&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9.9 Appendix I: Quotes from Focus Groups: Sports and Extra-Curricular Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth found helpful:</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Soccer uniforms&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Raised money for uniforms in the school&quot;</td>
<td>To minimize costs of travel and tournaments, schools consider inviting high calibre sports teams to their school for exhibition games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Clothes needed&quot; Pay for going to a game&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Fund raise in school to pay for indoor soccer&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Travel for sports&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Joining a team costs money&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Being in a tournament costs money&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Comments</td>
<td>Youth found helpful:</td>
<td>Youth suggestions for change</td>
<td>Suggestions for schools from key informants</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;extra money for sports, games, dances, some clubs have associated costs (cheerleading you had to, but volunteering things are free)&quot;</td>
<td>Public Library provides helpful homework space with Wi-Fi</td>
<td>&quot;In New York City there was two hours of help every day after school&quot;</td>
<td>Warm and safe places for Wi-Fi, charging phones, and with computers required after school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;School fee at the beginning of the year&quot;</td>
<td>Some school clubs provide after school homework support.</td>
<td>&quot;Can't hire tutors as cannot afford the cost, so need extra support to be available in school&quot;</td>
<td>Schools advertise where students can get access to free Wi-Fi and homework support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;ESL teacher provides homework support&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Existing free tutoring programs are oversubscribed&quot;</td>
<td>Provide Access to the school after hours especially to school libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YMCA provides homework support</td>
<td>&quot;ESL clubs should be open to all students&quot;</td>
<td>Schools work closely with their local public library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Regional Native Indian Centre programs&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Wi-Fi support programs are available: family is applying&quot;</td>
<td>Schools foster partnerships with community agencies including those running summer camps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.10 Appendix J: Quotes from Focus Groups: Homework</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Teachers (should) tell you where you can get can work done after school&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Youth Comments</td>
<td>Youth found helpful:</td>
<td>Youth suggestions for change</td>
<td>Suggestions for schools from key informants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;No quiet space to work at home, too much family noise&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;No light if electricity is off&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Lack of sleep at home because of violence in the home&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Focusing on school work may become a family issue&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;When Mom asks for help can’t disobey her&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Can’t disobey your Mom&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Being asked to cook when have a lot of assignments&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Did not have use of Wi-Fi at night, but need to have it&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot; Expect everyone to have it&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Get mad if say don’t&quot;</td>
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<td>Youth Comments</td>
<td>Youth suggestions for change</td>
<td>Suggestions for schools from key informants</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Homework assistance needed&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Tutoring can be expensive; sometimes it's free but those places are too packed to get the tutoring&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Public library is packed&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;You might have to take a bus to go to somewhere that has more staff available&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;You have to go around the city to find help&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Students are not willing to come forward, students are shy: they are made fun of and bullied&quot;</td>
<td>School leadership is seen as very important. The principal was seen as having a big role in what happened in the school so &quot;he/she should know how the students in need are faring in the school &quot;</td>
<td>That schools examine regularly their equity and inclusion practices and insure that their anti-bullying policies are alert to income-based bullying and stigma.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Help with home life is the bigger issue; families can't pay bills, no electricity, no shower&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;should be active leadership&quot;</td>
<td>That schools examine with their own students, parents and staff the cost of the school day in their school community and relate their findings to their equity policies and anti-bullying practices</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9.11 Appendix K: Quotes from Focus Groups: Attitudes Towards Poverty
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Comments</th>
<th>Youth helpful: found change</th>
<th>Youth suggestions for change</th>
<th>Suggestions for schools from key informants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School leadership is seen as very important. The principal was seen as having a big role in what happened in the school so &quot;he/she should know how the students in need are faring in the school &quot;; &quot;should be active leadership&quot;.</td>
<td></td>
<td>That schools advertise frequently, and in a variety of prominent places, the supports available to students within their schools: e.g., bus tickets for eligible students, breakfast programs, lunch programs, clothing and toiletry closets, applications for available outside funds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Students should get together who have issues with money and ask for a meeting with the principal&quot;.</td>
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<td>Schools put systems in place so that as far as possible youth and families do not have to ask for financial help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Students must take responsibility for seeking and getting help: they are not children&quot;.</td>
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<td>That schools wherever possible remove, and at the very least minimize, charging for all school related activities.</td>
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<td>&quot;Principal and teachers need to include all students in school events&quot;</td>
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<td>That schools ensure that there is consistent practice throughout the school in dealing with issues which could be related to low income and poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Advocate for more taxes being given for education purposes&quot;</td>
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<td>School social workers and school public health nurses and other community agencies such as Settlement Workers in schools work more closely together in their work to support families.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Students could go on strike.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Schools have full knowledge of the supports that are available for families on social assistance. E.g. OW will pay for the cost of Medical note.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Mara’s Mom needs help to get full time employment&quot; [Comment on case history]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Youth Comments | Youth helpful: | Youth suggestions for change | Suggestions for schools from key informants
---|---|---|---

Schools schedule flexible interview times to accommodate parents’ shift work, and those in precarious work situations. Communications to parents must recognize that not all parents have internet at home.

### 9.12 Appendix L: Committee Members

**Steering Committee Members**
- Lyndsy Baillie Secondary School Vice Principal. Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB)
- Carla D’Elia Secondary School Vice Principal. Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB)
- Laura Laverty Hamilton Public Health School Nurse
- Irene Heffernan Senior Project Manager of Employment and Education, Neighborhood Development, City of Hamilton
- Medora Uppal/ Sandra Parker Director Child and Youth Services Hamilton YWCA
- Linda Turner Educational Assistant HWDSB
- Aneta Zaniewska Youth Trustee, Notre Dame House, Good Shepherd Youth Services

**Other Key Informants**
- Terri Bedminster CEO, Refuge: Hamilton Centre for Newcomer Health
- Gail Belisario Manager of Equity HWDSB (retired)
- Duane Dahl Assistant Executive Director, Hamilton Boys and Girls Club.
- Brent Esau Community Health Director (includes Pathways for Education) COMPASS Community Health
- Leo Johnson CEO Empowerment Squared