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**Final Report of The Pathways to Education Program™  
to the Wellesley Urban Health Research Program**

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## **Final Report of The Pathways to Education Program™ of the Regent Park Community Health Centre to the Wellesley Urban Health Research Program**

The Pathways to Education Program is a unique initiative of the Regent Park Community Health Centre designed to address two of the principal social determinants of health; namely, education and income. Now entering its fifth year, the results of the program have been extremely positive in addressing a number of important issues related to youth engagement and success. The design of the program has been related elsewhere (including, for example, in our proposal to WCHC, as well as on our website) and an important element of the design is the inclusion of an ongoing research component which focuses on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program for the more than seven hundred youth participating. We are grateful for the grant provided by the WCHC which has supported, in part, the research activities. Of course, the views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Wellesley Central Health Corporation.

### **The Pathways to Education Program™**

The Pathways to Education Program is a unique initiative of the Regent Park Community Health Centre. It's goal is to realize the vision of the Health Centre; namely, that "The children of the community will become the doctors, nurses, social workers, community health workers, and administrators of the Health Centre. The vision challenges us to go beyond survival, to continue to strive for excellence, to continue to develop culturally relevant programs that improve access and create a healthy community environment. Our tools are collaboration and activism."

From this context, the program has developed as a major component of the Health Centre's commitment to the community; building on the work of practitioners in the Clinical, Community Health and Parents for Better Beginnings programs. The broad objectives of the Pathways to Education Program include to provide the necessary supports for young people from the community to be successful in high school and continue to post-secondary programs.

The Program was developed over a period of time which included extensive consultations with the community including focus groups with youth, parents (in first languages), school staffs, agency staff, and others in the field. As well, an examination of best practices from the literature and programs which were shown to demonstrably effective in raising academic achievement for disadvantaged youth was conducted to determine the necessary supports which might address the barriers identified by the community.

It is also important to note that the empirical basis for the program's development included data obtained from the Toronto District School Board which indicated that students from Regent Park had extremely high dropout rates; namely, that fully 56% of youth who began grade 9 in 1993 from local elementary schools dropped out prior to obtaining a high school diploma. Not only was this nearly double the rate for the City of Toronto (29%), the proportions of dropouts for children from single parent families and children of immigrants were even less likely to graduate with over 70% of these youth among those dropping out.

The community and other key informants indicated that the lack of a high school, coupled with the cutbacks experienced beginning in the mid-'90s, had placed an additional burden on families who could not afford the cost of transportation to schools outside the community, and the reductions in school-based supports (e.g. youth counselors) as a result of changes to the funding formula, coupled with extensive

curricular changes which compressed the secondary school program from five to four years, suggested that the already high dropout rate would increase further in the absence of significant action.<sup>1</sup>

It was against this backdrop that the RPCHC developed the Pathways program which was launched with its first cohort in September 2001. The Pathways to Education Program provides four types of support for students and parents:

- (a) **Academic Supports:** Tutoring four nights per week in all core subjects. All tutors are volunteers. Additional components have included a computer lab (delivered in partnership with Yonge Street Mission) available three nights a week, as well as several initiatives designed to support literacy development for those most academically at risk.
- (b) **Social Supports:** Bi-weekly group mentoring and off-week scheduled phone calls with mentors for grades 9 and 10 students. A “specialty” mentoring program of small group and individual support to youth aimed at their individual career and academic development has been developed for youth in grades 11 and 12; many of which are offered through partnerships developed with other community agencies, post-secondary institutions and other program partnerships. All mentors are volunteers.
- (c) **Financial Supports:** TTC tickets tied to attendance, distributed bi-weekly by Student/Parent Support Workers at the Regent Park Community Health Centre. The program is also endeavoring to place \$1,000 per student per year (to a maximum of \$4000) to be held in trust until high school graduation. The bursary monies are to be disbursed directly to the accredited post secondary institutions.
- (d) **Advocacy Supports:** Student/Parent Support Workers are the key link with parents, teachers, TDSB, P2E staff, Health Centre and community and they have physical presence in the more than thirty different schools that P2E students attend. They advocate for our students within the schools and bridge the cultural, linguistic and geographical distance between parents and schools to maximize parental involvement and support.

In addition, the Pathways to Education Program does research to ensure the ongoing and systemic collection of both qualitative and quantitative data which, taken together, are used to document the effectiveness of the supports, ensure accountability and program improvement and determine the replicable aspects of the program in other communities.

The program continues to enjoy widespread community support. As of September 2005, in our fifth year, participation includes 736 youth representing over 95% of the geographically eligible youth in the Health Centre’s catchment (which is predominantly Regent Park and Moss Park).

Staffing for the program includes 28.7 FTE (32 people) including 14FTE Student/Parent Support Workers; 3.6 FTEs Program Facilitators (Tutoring); 2.5 FTE Program Facilitator (Mentoring), 1.2FTE site support staff and 3 Coordinators (2 for SPSWs and 1 for Mentoring and Tutoring); Researcher; Administrative Assistant, 1.4 Reception and Program Director. In addition, there is a Director of Development and 1.5 assistants to ensure the necessary funding for the program.

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<sup>1</sup> The increase in the dropout rate as a result of curricular changes has been documented in the several phases of the “double-cohort” study by Alan King et al at Queen’s University who estimated a 16% increase in dropouts.

The budget for fiscal 2005/06 is \$2.9M, fully 85% of which is comprised of private donations and grants from a variety of foundation, corporate and individual sponsors. Over the four full years of operation a total of over \$8M has been raised and each year to date, funding needs have been exceeded.

## Research Objectives

The specific research objectives identified with the program were designed to both document the effectiveness of the program (and intern influence public policy) as well as to support program improvements, and include

- Regularly collect attendance and credit accumulation data
- Regularly collect comparative attendance and credit accumulation data
- Regularly collect qualitative data from all students
- Collect historical data on prior Regent Park cohorts
- Collect baseline data on post secondary applications, acceptance and enrollment.<sup>2</sup>

Data collection has proceeded in partnership with the Toronto District School Board. It must be noted that a major activity during the period of the WCHC grant has been the development of the capacity of both the TDSB and of Pathways to effectively and efficiently share the development of quantitative data and ensure the quality and completeness of these data. This has been largely success, though it must be noted that the delay in this report is largely a function of delays at the TDSB. However, the benefits of this collaboration are considerable as it reduces research costs to the Program while, at the same time, ensure both more and more reliable data for comparisons. An important result of the process has been the impact on the TDSB; in particular, that they have applied the lessons and protocols developed toward the identification of students across the TDSB who may be “at risk” and therefore may be the subject of focused interventions aimed at increasing student success. This is an important outcome of our collaboration and one that will extend the lessons learned from Pathways to (hopefully) increase the attainments of youth across the City.

## Methodology

### *Quantitative Data*

The relationship with the TDSB has resulted in clear identification of procedures to ensure the data necessary. (As well, the Program itself ensures additional “qualitative” data from a number of participants including students, parents and volunteer tutors and mentors, which are also outlined below.) Data has been designed to ensure five types of comparisons and includes the following: (a) each cohort of Pathways youth, (b) youth from Regent Park in the year immediately prior to Pathways, (c) Pathways’ students peers at the same major high schools who are not part of the program (since they are not in the catchment of the RPCHC), (d) peers in three other communities in the City, and the City as a whole, and (e) students who left the program (and, in most cases, the community).

The following procedures were developed over the past year with the TDSB to ensure the necessary data.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> An additional objective was identified, namely to collect data by census tract that might support additional analyses. Unfortunately, the census tract data cannot effectively correspond to the RPCHC catchment area and was not pursued as it could add little to the program effectiveness and program improvement goals for Pathways’ research.

Beginning in the spring of 2004, the Pathways to Education Program™ has received student data directly from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) which the Program employs in its ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness. The results of this evaluation research are reported to the variety of funders of the Program, including a range of foundation and corporate supporters as well as, most recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education.

This report: (i) provides a brief overview of the evolution, goals, services, and activities of the Pathways to Education Program; (ii) describes how student data were collected and compiled prior to our current data sharing relationship with the TDSB; (iii) outlines the data sharing protocol that has developed between Pathways and the TDSB; (iv) documents the procedures employed in cleaning the data and preparing it for analysis; (v) summarizes results of the Program's evaluation research, and (vi) outlines the avenues through which our research results are disseminated.

### *The Evolution, Goals, Services, and Activities of Pathways to Education*

Regent Park, the oldest and largest public housing project in Canada, continues to be one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in the city of Toronto. In light of the challenges faced by residents of Regent Park, along with the demonstrated relationship between education, income, and health, the Board of Directors for the Regent Park Community Health Centre in early 2000 began to discuss a plan for the development of a program that could promote and support academic achievement in high school for Regent Park youth. Specifically, the Centre's Board of Directors sought to implement measures that would mitigate the drop out rate, heighten opportunities, and generally attenuate the achievement gap between youth in Regent Park and the broader population of young people in Toronto. Based on a careful exploration of best practices, a review of the literature, and consultations with community stakeholders such as parents, youth, agency staff, and educators, the Centre staff concluded that providing students with financial, academic, mentoring, and trained staff support would be the best means of promoting success in high school. The Pathways to Education Program emerged from this vision and groundwork, with 2001-2002 being the pilot year for the program.

The overall short-term goal of the Pathways to Education Program is to support academic achievement and success in high school among youth in the Regent Park community. It is hoped that success in high school will encourage more Regent Park youth to pursue post-secondary education, thereby expanding their career opportunities and life chances. The long-term goal of the program is to achieve "community succession" – that is, having Pathways students become future professionals for the Health Centre and the Regent Park community as a whole. To achieve these goals, the specific objectives of the program are to:

1. increase school attendance;
2. improve grades;
3. increase the proportion of students achieving their credits in each year of high school, particularly in the earlier grades (9 and 10), where the lack of credit accumulation has been linked to subsequent school leaving;
4. increase the connections between the students and their parents, and the schools;
5. increase the proportion of students graduating from high school; and,

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<sup>3</sup> While the partnership began prior to the 04/05 academic year, lessons from initial attempts required significant adjustments and it was the work over the past twelve months which produced the detailed protocol for data sharing, and the revisions which have resulted in the high quality data the project requires.

6. increase the proportion of students applying to, accepted by, and enrolling in post-secondary institutions.

These objectives are met by providing Regent Park residents with public transportation tickets and school supplies to lessen the financial burden of going to school along with tutoring and mentoring services. In addition, the program sets aside \$1,000 for each student participant to a maximum of \$4,000. Upon their graduation from high school, the funds accumulated for each student is used toward the individual's tuition and other expenses at a designated post-secondary educational institution. Finally, each student is assigned a Student Parent Support Worker as an advocacy support for both the student and parents, and as a problem solving and liaison support within the high schools. All of these supports are provided for the full length of participants' secondary school education.

A key feature of the Pathways program is that it strives to be all-inclusive. That is, in contrast with most programs which only offer services and supports to some young people through "creaming" or "targeting" measures, Pathways aims to serve the entire geographically defined Regent Park community by enrolling *all* Grade 8 students in the area rather than those deemed to be most "deserving" to receive support.

The Pathways Program is currently exploring avenues of collaboration between itself and a range of TDSB initiatives aimed at secondary school age youth. TDSB implemented four types of interventions: *prevention, retention, remediation, and re-engagement*. Pathways and the TDSB are working in partnership to develop the most effective and efficient means of acquiring data and evaluating the effectiveness of the various interventions devised by the TDSB.

#### *Collection and Compilation of Data prior to Current Data Sharing Relationship with the TDSB*

In the first two years of the Pathways Program, program evaluation was based on student data collected by Pathways staff and *aggregated* student data provided by the TDSB. Attendance data (collected monthly) and credit accumulation data taken from student report cards were manually entered into a computer spreadsheet program. The Pathways Researcher created separate data files for each Pathways cohort. As a point of comparison, the research staff at the TDSB provided the program with attendance and credit accumulation data for students at the five schools attended by the majority of Pathways students. There were, however, two limitations with these comparison data. First, the data provided by the TDSB were summary data as opposed to individual-level data. This limited the Pathways Researcher in terms of the data analyses she could perform. Second, the TDSB research staff was unable to provide peer data composed only of non-Pathways students. In other words, the data used as a point of comparison included data for Pathways participants, thereby limiting its effectiveness as a control.

As an additional control, the TDSB provided data for two historical Regent Park cohorts that began high school one and two years prior to the 2001 launch of the Pathways Program. As with the peer data, the TDSB provided summary data for the historical cohorts. As noted above, the provision of summary data for the control groups placed limitations on the sorts of analyses that could be performed. In addition, the manual entry of the data for Pathways students into the computer spreadsheet program was extremely time consuming.

For these reasons, in the spring of 2004, the Pathways Program Director and Researcher entered into negotiations with the TDSB to obtain disaggregated data on each of the student populations analyzed in Pathways evaluation research. In the summer of 2004, the TDSB delivered to Pathways disaggregated data for Pathways students and the two comparison groups indicated above. In the summer of 2005, these data were augmented by data for three comparison communities (namely, Jane/Finch, Malvern, and Rexdale) that serve as additional controls in the ongoing evaluation of the Pathways Program.

## *Data Sharing Protocol between the Pathways to Education Program and the Toronto District School Board*

This section outlines the model for the sharing of electronic student data that continues to evolve between the Pathways to Education Program and the TDSB. First, the research staff at the TDSB extract data from student records housed in the TDSB Data Warehouse. Separate data files are created for (a) Pathways to Education participants; (b) the peers of Pathways students; (c) students from two historical Regent Park cohorts (Regent Park Historical Cohorts A and B, which respectively began high school one and two years prior to the launch of the Pathways Program); and (d) the three comparison communities. The latter three groups serve as controls or points of comparison in assessing the achievement of Pathways' participants.

TDSB data extracts are produced in accordance with requirements specified through written documentation by the Program Director and Researcher at Pathways, with this submitted documentation including a TDSB Service Request Form. A Business Analyst with the Business Applications, Project Management and Systems Services Division of the TDSB transmits the data sets electronically to the Pathways' Researcher.

Upon receipt of these data from the TDSB, the Pathways' research team cleans and analyzes the data sets in order to evaluate the program's effectiveness in achieving its stated goals. A Data Protocol Report is submitted to the TDSB that outlines in detail what Pathways does with the data after receiving it. Also submitted to the TDSB is a list documenting any problems with the data so that these issues might be dealt with in future data received. In addition, periodic meetings are arranged between Pathways representatives (specifically, the Program Director and the Program Researcher) and representatives from TDSB to review requirements and concerns regarding the data.

### *Steps in Preparing the TDSB Data for Analysis*

The first stage in the research process involves "cleaning" the electronic data files provided by the TDSB and creating the variables required to carry out the analyses. Data cleaning has typically encompassed the following steps:

1. importation of files received from the TDSB into the SPSS software program (Statistical product and Service Solutions, formerly Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), the statistical data analysis program used to analyze the data;
2. examination of each of the several data files to ensure the completeness of the data; i.e., that all variables have been included and that the data for each represents the range of possible responses;
3. assignment of numerical values to the value labels associated with categorical variables in order to convert such variables to numeric variables;
4. assignment of names to variables where the original variable name exceeded 8 characters and was therefore not retained when the data were imported into SPSS;
5. in the comparison peers file, we have assigned grades to students based on age and credits accumulated to the end of the last academic year;<sup>1</sup>
6. manual entry of data for Pathways students in the Catholic School System into Pathways data file;
7. merging the various student data files into one master SPSS file in order to carry out the analyses;
8. creation of an overarching stream variable for each grade based on the stream(s) at which students studied Math, English, and Science at each grade level;
9. computation of several major outcome variables used in this aspect of the evaluation – that is, variables related to *absenteeism* and to *credit accumulation* – from existing variables;

10. validation of data accuracy through ‘spot checking’ of a sample of students’ data from the TDSB compared to those same students’ data computed from monthly attendance and independent credit data received directly from the high schools (via Pathways’ Student Parent Support Workers);
11. analysis of descriptive statistics produced from the data file to ensure that the numbers make sense.

#### Additional Data

As the first cohort of Pathways youth were to graduate in 2005, and to meet the objective of providing comparisons of post-secondary entry, additional data has been sought from the provincial bodies responsible for the coordination of college (Ontario College Application Service) and university (Ontario University Application Centre) data, respectively. We had expected such baseline data would be available earlier in the Spring. However, delays at these organizations continue, though the data is now expected to be available later this Fall, with initial analyses provided through the Toronto District School Board. In future years, it is expected that these data – on applications, confirmations and actual attendance at colleges and universities – will be incorporated into the TDSB database, thereby allowing easier access as part of the regular data sharing between Pathways and the TDSB. However, the protocol between OUAC, OCAS and the TDSB has not been finalized as yet.

In addition, it should be noted that the data available from these admission bodies have not to date included “acceptances”. This is a significant shortcoming in the available data; namely, that it is not possible to distinguish between those students who did not confirm or attend because they were not accepted by different institutions, from those who did not attend because of particular other barriers (e.g. lack of funds, other plans) or because they accepted offers from a different institution. While having such data would seem obvious if access barriers are to be understood and addressed, no such data has in fact been available.

#### Pathways Focus Group and Survey Data

As part of the effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program as well as to support program improvement several additional types of data were collected with the support of the WCHC grant. Specifically, surveys were conducted of students in the program, as well as with volunteer tutors and mentors. (It should be noted that over 200 volunteers were involved in 04/05 academic year.) As well, focus groups were conducted with a sample of these volunteers; and focus groups were held in first languages with parents. The instruments were designed, focus groups conducted, and data analysis provided by an independent researcher contracted by the Program during the Spring 2005.

With respect to parents, seven different focus groups were held in the evening in June 2005 at the Regent Park Community Health Center.<sup>4</sup> In total, seventy-one parents participated in the focus groups that were carried out in Somali, Bengali, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Tamil and English. The focus groups were each conducted by a facilitator in the first language of the parents. The facilitators debriefed in English to assemble the results of the focus groups. Since groups were held in first languages, however, the number of direct quotations available for citation is limited.

With respect to students, a survey was conducted with participants in the program in April-May 2005. A total of 441 students completed the survey, representing close to three-quarters of all the participants in the program. The survey respondents were 50.1% female, 44.0% male and 5.9% did not disclose their gender. The breakdown across the grades is as follows: 33.0% in Grade 9, 32.3% in Grade 10, 19.4% in

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<sup>4</sup> It was determined that language and literacy challenges precluded using a written survey to elicit the perceptions with parents.

Grade 11 and 15.3% in Grade 12. The cultural backgrounds reported by the largest numbers of respondents are Chinese, Bengali, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan, Canadian, Somali and Jamaican which, taken together, account for just over two-thirds of respondents.

With respect to volunteer tutors and mentors, two forms of feedback were elicited: focus groups were conducted in March 2005 and an online survey was conducted in April-May 2005. Almost fifty-five percent of the more than 160 volunteer tutors completed the 2005 Pathways to Education on-line Tutor Survey. Of respondents, 55.7% are women and just under half of the respondents, 45.5%, indicated that they are currently full-time students while 36.4% of the respondents are full-time employed. The majority of the respondents to the survey, 72.7%, were new tutors in 2004-5 while the remainder had tutored with Pathways in previous years. Forty-six mentors of sixty group mentors completed the survey and of these respondents, 71.7% are female (n=33) and 28.3% male (n=13). This represents close to three-quarters of the total volunteer mentors for 2004-5. Approximately 45% of the responding group mentors are English Canadian culturally, 15% Caribbean, nearly 10% African, and the balance from a variety of cultures, largely Asian. The tutors who responded were less likely to be English Canadian (about one-third) and more likely to be Asian, including more than ten percent who identified themselves as Chinese.

The topics for the focus groups with group mentors included: *Perceived Role as Group Mentor, Challenges Faced by Group Mentors, Mentor Training and Support, and Effective Group Mentoring Activities*. Topics for the focus groups with tutors included *What is Working Well at Tutoring, Challenges at Tutoring, Key Suggestions for Improvement, and Comments on Specific Tutoring Sites*. The results of the focus groups and surveys were reported independently and written reports prepared which sought to integrate the findings into a single report with respect to volunteer tutors and a separate report for group mentors which integrated both the survey and focus group results.

## Results

The results of Program continue to be impressive and, most important, consistent over the four years to date. This is evidenced in the attached tables.

### *Differences in attendance between Pathways participants and a Regent Park historical cohort*

Study results demonstrate that the Pathways program has succeeded in promoting greater school attendance among Regent Park youth. Table 1 shows differences in absentee rates between the first three cohorts of Pathways participants and the historical cohorts of Regent Park students who began Grade 9 prior to the birth of the program. In their Grade 9 year (2000-01), the students in historical Regent Park cohort A missed an average of 10.8 percent of full school days.<sup>8</sup> The first Pathways cohort missed 3.4 percent *fewer* days (10.8% versus 7.4%) in its Grade 9 year (2001-02). Moreover, in the grade 9 year, this figure steadily declined among subsequent Pathways cohorts, with the third Pathways cohort missing 4.3 percent of school days, less than half the mean of the historical cohort in its Grade 9 year (10.8% versus 4.3 percent).

Comparisons between Pathways students and the historical cohort in subsequent grades similarly attest to the success of the program in reducing student absenteeism. In Grade 10, the mean absenteeism rate of the first Pathways cohort is slightly less than half that of historical cohort A (18.6% for the historical cohort compared with 8.8% for Pathways cohort 1), with the second Pathways cohort showing an even lower mean for its Grade 10 year. In Grade 11, the mean absenteeism rate for the first Pathways cohort was 7.4 percent lower than that for historical cohort B (8.5% versus 15.9%).

Perhaps even more important than the results reported above is the finding that, at all grade levels, a substantially smaller percentage of participants from the three Pathways cohorts missed 15 percent or more full school days compared with students in the historical Regent Park cohorts. Table 1 reports that fewer Pathways participants in all three cohorts missed 15 percent or more school days in their Grade 9 year compared with students in the Regent Park historical cohort A (24.4% of students in the historical cohort missed 15% or more school days in grade 9, compared with 13.2%, 13%, and 5.6% respectively for Pathways cohorts 1, 2, and 3). In addition, the table shows a dramatic decrease in the percentage of Pathways students who missed 15 percent or more school days in Grade 9 between the second and third program cohorts, with the percentage of students in this category dropping from 13 percent for the second cohort to 5.6 percent for the third cohort. The findings are similar for Grade 10, where the percentage of students in historical Regent Park group (35.3%) who missed 15 percent or more of school days is almost twice that of the first Pathways cohort in its Grade 10 year (19.8%), and more than three times that of the second Pathways cohort (10.4%). In Grade 11, the percentage of Pathways' cohort 1 students in this category is approximately 15 percent lower than that of the comparison group (Historical Regent Park Cohort B). These findings demonstrate that the Pathways program has succeeded in decreasing the percentage of Regent Park students who are most at risk of dropping out of school based on school attendance.

#### *Differences in attendance between Pathways participants and their peers*

Where absenteeism rates are concerned, Tables 2, 3 and 4 show that Pathways participants compared favourably with their peers at the five main Toronto high schools attended by Regent Park youth in 2003-04. Table 2 presents the results of one-sample *t*-tests that compare the mean absenteeism rate of Pathways students at each grade level to that of the overall population of high school students at the five main schools. These analyses reveal that Pathways participants constitute a unique population of students, as the mean absenteeism rate for this group is significantly less than that of the general high school population at all three grade levels. The mean absenteeism rate for Grade 9 Pathways students was 4.4 per cent less than that of the general Grade 9 population, with this result being significant at the .001 level ( $t=-9.65$ ,  $d.f.=159$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Grade 10 Pathways students averaged 6.5 per cent fewer full day absences than the general grade 10 population in 2003-04, also significant at the .001 level ( $t=-10.04$ ,  $d.f.=143$ ,  $p=.000$ ). In grade 11, the difference between Pathways students and the general high school population in terms of absenteeism rate was 3 per cent, with this result achieving significance at the .01 alpha level ( $t=-2.9$ ,  $d.f.=88$ ,  $p=.005$ ).

Table 3 shows the differences in absenteeism rates between Pathways students and their peers broken down by gender. Male Pathways students attended school with slightly greater frequency than female Pathways students in Grades 9 and 10, with this trend being reversed in Grade 11. More importantly and echoing the *t*-test results, Table 3 shows that both male and female Pathways participants had substantively lower mean absenteeism rates than their peers at all three grade levels. This finding is particularly pronounced in Grades 9 and 10. In Grade 9, the mean absenteeism rate for male and female Pathways participants was approximately half that of their peers (4.8% versus 9.9% respectively for males, and 3.6% versus 9% for females). In Grade 10, among male students, the absenteeism rate for the comparison group is three times higher than that for Pathways students (15% for the comparison group versus 5% for Pathways students), with this difference yielding a moderate to large effect size of .67. Among female students in Grade 10, Pathways participants missed 4.7 percent fewer full school days than their peers (6.1% versus 10.8% respectively).

Table 4 provides further evidence of the success of the Pathways Program in reducing the number of Regent Park youth who are most at risk of not completing high school. Specifically, the table shows that, at each grade level, a substantially *smaller* percentage of male and female Pathways students missed 15 percent or more school days in 2003-04 compared with their peers at the five schools primarily attended

by Regent Park youth. Among male students, the percentage of non-Pathways students who missed 15% or more school days was three times that of Pathways' cohort 3 in Grade 9 (22.5% versus 7% respectively), and more than four times that of Pathways' cohort 2 in Grade 10 (38.8% versus 7.9% respectively). Among female students, there were five times as many students from the comparison group in this category in Grade 9 (19.4% of students in the comparison group missed 15% or more days compared with 4.1% of Pathways' participants), and almost twice as many as the Pathways population in Grade 10 (23.7% for the comparison group versus 12.3% for Pathways' participants).

### *Credit accumulation*

In addition to reducing student absenteeism rates, this research revealed that the Pathways Program has been successful in helping participants to achieve their high school credits. Table 5 reports the results of one-sample *t*-tests that show that Pathways students average more earned credits than the general student population at the five main high schools at all three grade levels. Specifically, the analysis revealed that Grade 9 Pathways students averaged one credit more than the general population of students, while Grade 10 and 11 Pathways students averaged slightly more than two credits beyond the mean number earned by their peers. The mean difference at all grade levels achieves statistical significance at the .001 alpha level.

Table 6 presents data that compare the credit accumulation of Pathways students to the Regent Park historical cohort A after the first two years of high school. As seen in the table, a larger percentage of Pathways students accumulated all or nearly all of the 16 credits they should have by the end of Grade 10 compared with the pre-Pathways Regent Park cohort. Specifically, the Table reveals that approximately 45 percent of Pathways students in both cohorts achieved between 15 and 16 credits in cohorts 1 and 2 respectively, compared with 35 percent for the Regent Park historical cohort. More importantly, the percentage of Pathways students who are 6 or more credits short is substantially lower than that of the historical cohort. Indeed, the percentage of cohort 2 Pathways students in this category is less than half the percentage for the comparison group (18.4% versus 42.6% respectively). In the case of Pathways cohort 1, the percentage is almost one-third less than that of the comparison group (15.1% versus 42.6% respectively).

Table 7 reveals a similar trend for Grade 11, as 52.8 percent of Pathways students had acquired 22.5 or more credits compared with 38.4 percent of their peers – a difference of almost 20 percent. Conversely, the percentage of Pathways students eight or more credits short of the total they should have by the end of Grade 11 was almost half that of the historical comparison group (15.7% versus 30.3% respectively).

Tables 8, 9, and 10 report data for the 2003-2004 school year grouped by gender for Pathways participants and their peers at the five main schools for cohorts 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The findings reported in these Tables further illuminate the success of the Pathways program. In all three tables, for both male and female students, Pathways participants show slightly higher mean credit totals than their peers, illustrating that Pathways participants are on par with their peers where credit accumulation is concerned. For all three cohorts and for both males and females, a larger percentage of Pathways students achieved all or nearly all of their credits compared with their peers. More importantly, the percentage of Pathways students most at risk of not completing high school (i.e., students 8 or more credits short of where they should be in Grade 11, 6 or more credits short in Grade 10, and 3 or more credits short in Grade 9) is substantially lower than that of the comparison group for both male and female students at all three grade levels.

### *Findings from Pathways' Research with Program Participants*

The numbers reported above indicate that the Pathways program has achieved considerable success in helping Regent Park youth to succeed in high school. Having illuminated the program's success through quantitative analyses the secondary data provided by the Toronto District School Board, the question remains as to *why* Pathways is achieving these results. In this section, we will report some findings from a 2005 participant satisfaction survey with Pathways' students in an effort to gain insight into the program's accomplishments.

Overall, 86.9 per cent of Pathways participants (N=441) in the 2005 Pathways survey stated that participation in Pathways helped them to achieve better grades in school. Eighty-one per cent of Pathways participants reported that the Program helped them to believe that they could succeed in school. Seventy percent of respondents indicated that Pathways helped them to stay in school. Finally, 60.1 per cent of participants indicated that Pathways helped them to get along better with their teachers.

Kahne and Bailey (1999) contend that the key to the success of the U.S.-based "I Have a Dream" initiative is its capacity to foster relationships of trust and understanding between program officials and participants.<sup>5</sup> Such trusting relationships, contend the authors, constitute the basis needed to motivate youth and instill a commitment to academic achievement. Findings from our qualitative research indicate that Pathways has achieved similar success in building relationships of trust between program staff and volunteers and the young people who participate in the program. Data collected from the survey of Pathways students revealed that students appreciate the program because it links them to people they know they can count on for support:

*There are people we can get help from. You feel more confident in your work.*

*If you have problems, you have someone to talk to, you can get help, you know where to go.*

*It helped me a lot. Financially [and] with my work. Skills we're going to have in the future.*

*[It] does make a difference. [We] get help from the program. If [we were] not in the program, nothing to fall back on.*

*I feel better at high school because I know they are there to support me.*

More than two-thirds of participants at all grade levels indicated being "very satisfied" with their SPSW. Students had many positive things to say about their SPSWs. For example:

*He listens to me and my concerns, tries his best to help me, and always encourages me.*

*I liked the fact that my SPSW shows a serious commitment towards making me the best I can be, both in school and in the community.*

A clear majority of students indicated that their SPSW helped them either very much or somewhat with the following issues in the order in which students ranked the support to be strongest: school attendance, problems at school, communicating feedback from teachers, and selecting courses. In each of these areas, less than 10 per cent of students reported that their SPSW was not helpful. When asked how often they spoke with their SPSW one-to-one (either by telephone or in person), 87.5 percent of students reported speaking with their SPSW at least every two weeks, while over half (54.6 %) reported speaking with their

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<sup>5</sup> Kahne, J. and Bailey, K. (1999). The role of social capital in youth development: The case of 'I Have a Dream'." *Educational Policy and Prevention*, 21(3), 321-343.

SPSW at least once a week. Only 7 per cent indicated that they speak with their SPSW approximately once a month and 5.6 percent reported rarely or never communicate with their SPSW.

Pathways participants indicated similarly high levels of satisfaction with the mentoring and tutoring components of the program. Just over three-quarters (75.9%) of respondents indicated that, overall, they were satisfied with the group mentoring experience during the 2004-05 academic year, including 36 percent who were “very satisfied.” Specialty Mentoring proved to be highly successful. The vast majority of respondents (91.3%) reported that they were satisfied with their Specialty Mentoring opportunities (N=104), of which 67.4 per cent reported being “very satisfied.” Moreover, 95.7 per cent of respondents indicated that they shared an excellent or good relationship with their specialty mentor.<sup>9</sup> Where tutoring is concerned, 80 per cent of students reported that they were generally satisfied with the support that they were receiving from this component of the program; 45 per cent reported that they were “very satisfied.” When asked about their relationship with the volunteer tutors as well as the helpfulness and overall effectiveness of the tutoring they were receiving, over three-quarters of the students indicated that they considered the support to be either “good” or “excellent.”

By and large, the support that students received from the Pathways program seemed to instill in them a sense of confidence, encourage pride in their community, reinforce the value of education, as well as expose them to greater possibilities for the future. In the words of the students themselves:

*I believe the SPSW and mentoring helped me the most because it gives me confidence about myself and shows there are others who care.*

*Everyone in the program made a difference. I became more confident about myself, and am really happy that there are people out there who care.*

*Makes you want to take your education more serious.*

*I feel that through the program I have made a difference how I feel about myself, Because now I feel that I have a better.... Perspective about my community.*

*Seeing what the future holds for me, and taking the steps to get there....*

Students also praised the program for the financial support it provided, commenting in particular on the importance of the public transportation tickets that they received. In all, participants expressed an appreciation for all of the supports provided by Pathways:

*It's a great program for people who are in need.  
This program had helped me in a way I cannot repay it. I am grateful and honoured to be a P2E kid.*

*It is a really good program and that you're all helping us and care about us.  
Thank you.*

As far as Pathways students' post secondary aspirations are concerned, just under half of the respondents (45.6%) indicated interest in obtaining a university degree; approximately three-quarters (24.3%) would like to obtain a college diploma; 16.1 percent indicated that they plan to enter the workforce; 5 percent were interested in pursuing a trade. These results are roughly comparable with those obtained from the 1997 *Every Secondary Student Survey*. According to this report, which employed data collected across all secondary schools in the former City of Toronto, 53 percent of Toronto High school students aspired to

university; 17 percent reported that they wanted to attend community college; 7 percent planned to work full-time; 4 percent indicated other plans; and 19 percent were unsure (Cheng and Yau, 1999).<sup>6</sup>

#### *Year 4: First Pathways “Graduating” Year*

As noted earlier, the Year 4 data has, as yet, not been made available by the Toronto District School Board. However, some data, namely for Pathways cohorts, though not for historical, peer or community comparisons, can be briefly referenced. These preliminary data suggest that the results for each of Pathways’ four cohorts to date continues to be strong. There has been additional increases in attendance and credit accumulation and, as a result, smaller proportions of Regent Park youth at each grade level are to be considered seriously at risk academically. With over six hundred students in the four cohorts, it is reasonable to conclude that approximately 15% or so of youth in Regent Park and at each grade are significantly behind their peers and expectations; that is, they are more than one year behind where they should be and are therefore at significant risk of not graduating.

The figures for Pathways initial cohort are most gratifying. Fully forty percent of the first cohort still in the community and Pathways graduated after four years. This is consistent with four year graduation rates suggested by the “double cohort” study (King, et al; 2004). In addition, it is reasonable to suggest that an additional forty percent may graduate after another year, yielding a five-year graduation rate of approximately 80%. This would surpass the current estimates offered by both the Premier and the Minister of Education, each of whom have been recently quoted as suggesting a province-wide dropout rate of 32%. We should also note that their concerns have focused specifically on males and on applied level students. As the data cited above suggests, Pathways male students and applied students appear to significantly outperform their peers. Perhaps equally important, in each year of Pathways, larger proportions of students are studying at the academic level compared to previous years and, particularly to students from Regent Park prior to Pathways; with an increase in the proportion from just over 40% to just under 75% for Pathways fourth cohort. This represents a significant change in the level or “stream” at which most Regent Park young people study and the difference suggests significant potential for increased academic success and subsequent opportunity.

With respect to post-secondary attainments, the data is obviously limited to the initial graduates from Pathways’ first cohort. Of the initial 36 graduates, fully 86% applied to colleges and universities. Over 90% were accepted at at least one institution; fully 84% were accepted at two or more. Of those accepted, more than three quarters will be attending, the balance having chosen to return to pick up additional courses or improve grades with a view to applying again for a particular program or institution they wish to attend.

An additional result of this most positive activity is that Pathways has continued to develop relationships with a number of post-secondary institutions in an effort to ensure that our graduates will receive the important supports they may require to be successful in their continued studies; and, to do so will require an increase in the organizational capacity of several of these institutions.

#### *Focus Group and Survey Findings*

The research with participants also provided important responses about both the effectiveness of the program and avenues for possible program improvement.

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<sup>6</sup> Cheng, M., and Yau, M. (1999, June). *The 1997 every secondary student survey: Detailed findings*. Toronto: Toronto District School Board.

### *Parent Focus Group Findings*

Many parents expressed their gratitude that their children were able to access free tutoring to help them with their school work. Many parents found themselves in situations where they were unable to offer academic support to their children at home, for example, parents that had recently immigrated to Canada and were unfamiliar with the Canadian school system or not yet fluent in the English language, as well as single parents who hold several jobs.

Parents were also generally pleased with their children's participation in Group Mentoring. Although some parents found that their children were not interested in participating, for the majority, their children were enjoying the experience. Several parents with sons were especially pleased that they were learning to cook at mentoring. Parents that had immigrated recently were also pleased that their children were being introduced to various aspects of Canadian culture through group mentoring.

Parents were thrilled with the Career Mentoring program. They appreciated the assistance with course selection as well as resume writing, tours of college and university campuses, and help with applications to university and/or college. Several parents were proud that their children had recently received acceptance to universities and colleges. Parents that had recently immigrated to Canada were particularly grateful for this support because they were unfamiliar with the post-secondary academic system and felt that they would not have been able to offer advice to their children.

Many parents gave rave reviews of the support they received from their SPSWs. For many, the SPSW had helped them and their children through difficult situations at school and parents relied on their SPSW to regularly keep them informed about their child's progress at school. However, for some families, due to language barriers, they were unable to communicate regularly with their SPSW and as a consequence, these parents were also much less informed about the various components of the Pathways to Education program.

Parents were very grateful for the financial supports in the form of the bursaries offered for post-secondary education as well as the provision of TTC tickets.

Parents highlighted communication between the Pathways program and themselves as a key area for improvement in the future. Some suggested that Pathways host meetings similar to the focus group discussions more frequently in order to be able to provide more opportunity for parents to express their concerns and to ask questions about the program.

### *Tutor Feedback*

The vast majority of the tutors responding, 88.7%, felt that the tutoring program was having a positive impact on students. Half of these consider the program to be having a *great* impact. In the words of one tutor: *"I believe we make a big impact. They are meeting different people - students and tutors alike - so this is exposing them to different people, ideas, and lifestyles. We may not see the immediate impact but I am sure Pathways is making a difference."*

All tutors indicated that they had benefited in numerous ways by volunteering with Pathways. The most common responses were 'a sense of satisfaction,' 'personal growth and development,' and 'skill development.'

The overwhelming majority of tutors, 93.2%, indicated that they felt appreciated for their volunteer work, 71.6% of these felt *very* appreciated. The majority of tutors, 60.2%, are interested in returning to volunteer with Pathways again next year - a high retention rate for volunteer tutors.

Tutors highlighted math, reading comprehension and written expression, analytic thinking and study and organizational skills as the most common academic concerns of the students they worked with.

Overall, tutors were generally enthusiastic about their participation in the program and listed many aspects of tutoring that they enjoyed including: interacting with the students; seeing students progress at school, contributing to the aims of Pathways; getting to know the other people involved in Pathways, the cultural diversity of the students; gaining teaching and tutoring experience; and the supportive staff at Pathways.

Alternatively, tutors disliked some students' sporadic attendance and attitudes towards tutoring; disciplining disruptive students; juggling too many students at one time; when students want their work done for them; the commute and fitting tutoring into their busy schedules; and sometimes feeling discouraged about whether they were making a difference.

Fully 97.8% of the tutors who attended the training session offered at the beginning of the year (though not all were able to) found it to be valuable and over a quarter of these found it *very* valuable. When asked if the training sessions should be offered on a more regular basis throughout the year, 70.5% of the eighty-eight respondents thought this was important and a third of these thought it was *very* important.

Most tutors were positive in their feedback about the support received from Tutor Program Facilitators: *"The staff are always enthusiastic, supportive and helpful. I appreciate how well they know the students and how they know who needs help with what."* Examples of additional support offered included better facilitation of matching students with appropriate tutors and better supervision and help dealing with disruptive students.

In sum, tutors with the Pathways program are clearly very dedicated and engaged as they contributed a wealth of detailed comments and suggestions for improvements through the on-line survey. Overall, feedback on the structure and impact of the Pathways to Education program was very positive.

### *Group Mentors' Responses*

When asked how much they thought that the mentoring is having an impact on the students 82.5% thought that it was having an impact including 27.3% who stated that the program is having a great impact on the students. Mentors noted that group mentoring was a positive space for students to develop social skills, to explore new ideas and grow as individuals and to have the opportunity to have career mentoring. On the other hand, some mentors felt that some students were ambivalent towards group mentoring and were simply attending out of obligation.

When asked about the development of constructive relationships between the mentors and the students in the group, 81.8% felt that relationships had developed to a great extent or to some extent. Further, 78.0% thought that relationships among the students in their group had developed to a great extent or to some extent. When asked whether the students in their groups were beginning to feel and act like a group 78.1% indicated that this was taking place including 37.5% who stated that this was taking place to a great extent. Mentors cited poor attendance, infrequent mentoring sessions and the inability to develop one-to-one relationships with students due to the lack of access to phone numbers and e-mails of their group members as impediments to the relationship building process.

There was a great deal of enthusiasm expressed about participating in the program and mentors often cited the relationships they built with students as what they liked best about being involved with Pathways: *"The connection to the students. Feeling like maybe, I could make a difference in their lives."*

*And ultimately, their success.*” For some, it was satisfying to be involved in developing a good group dynamic amongst their students. Many felt the program was well organized and that they were well supported by the Pathways staff.

Some mentors voiced frustration at the lack of time to meet with their group and a number were disappointed with the sporadic attendance of some students as this made it difficult for relationships to evolve and groups to become cohesive. Some mentors found the lack of enthusiasm of a few of the students for mentoring activities to be discouraging.

Overall, the feedback on the training at the beginning of the school year, the ongoing training and support provided by the Mentor Program Facilitator, the assistance from the Site Support Staff and the written handouts and materials was very positive. The informal debriefing sessions with the Mentor Program Facilitator and other mentors held after every mentoring session were found to be particularly valuable by many of the respondents.

Mentors reported experiencing many benefits of volunteering as a mentor for Pathways. The most commonly cited benefits include a sense of satisfaction, an opportunity to contribute to the community and make a difference in a concrete way as well as the chance to gain valuable work experience.

All mentors reported feeling appreciated by the Pathways program and 80.0% reported that they felt *very* appreciated. Mentors also have a sense that their constructive feedback and ideas about improving the program are taken into account. In the words of one mentor: *“Every chance that the staff had, they shared their appreciation with the volunteers.”*

Mentors have observed the following improvements to the program over the course of the year as well as over past years: Better communication between staff and volunteers; more direction and support, particularly through the debriefing sessions; and improvement in the organized mentoring activities as well as the set-up of the program and site location.

In terms of improvements to the training and support received by mentors, suggestions that were rated favorably by mentors include increasing the training sessions with Pathways to Education staff, providing more written hand-outs with practical advice on mentoring techniques and activities, receiving more support and direction to engage students and having access to more background information about students. Some suggestions put forward by mentors include using the Pathways web-site as a communication tool for mentors and students (for example to post mentoring activity resources and the schedule of upcoming events), providing a handbook of mentoring activities that have been successful in the past; emphasizing the training provided on group dynamics and finally, building community amongst Pathway volunteers by organizing events that bring together the mentors and the tutors to be able to share their experiences and exchange ideas about engaging the students.

Overall, the volunteer mentors’ feedback in terms of the training and support, structure of the program and volunteer appreciation at Pathways to Education was generally positive. Furthermore, mentors submitted extensive comments, indicating their high level of engagement and enthusiasm for the program.

## **Project Outcomes**

There are several outcomes in addition to the collection and analysis of data outlined above.

Program outcomes include continued improvements to the program itself. Specifically, the research data has suggested the need to focus additional resources and efforts on the smaller, but important, group within each cohort who continue to be most academically at risk. While additional data analysis is

ongoing, the research led to the development of increased support through a dedicated staff member with expertise in special education to support both staff and students. As well, the past year saw a focus on literacy and numeracy skills through new initiatives in partnership with the Toronto Public Library and an increase in the number of tutors working one-to-one with special needs students. The work of SPSWs was also supported to have them focus on those with more academic challenges and their advocacy for those students needing psycho-educational assessments and placements which would respond to their academic needs.

In addition, Pathways has developed a partnership with Yonge Street Mission to provide access to a computer lab for research related to course assignments, careers, summer and part-time employment, etc. It is expected that the lab will also provide additional literacy and numeracy support through a range of computer-based programs.

The research results, particular input from volunteer tutors and mentors, resulted in program improvements in several areas. For example, following such feedback, group mentors have received additional support by meeting as a group following the mentoring sessions, thus providing the opportunity for mentors working with different groups of students to debrief and receive ongoing support from Pathways staff.

As well, the feedback of tutors resulted in a more effective process to share information among student/parent support workers, who receive course specific information from teachers at the more than forty high schools attended by Pathways students, Pathways' program facilitators who work with tutors, and the tutors themselves. The redesigned logs provide the opportunity for students and tutors to demonstrate they are attending to the challenges identified by subject teachers and that their goals for tutoring sessions are clear and related to their academic needs.

Parent focus groups identified several features of import. First, it is clear that the value of mentoring, as distinct from tutoring and other academic supports, is now well understood and supported. Second, the groups indicated a clear desire for additional information on both program activities and on the secondary schools that their children attend. To respond to these needs, the Program developed several workshops for parents over the past year including open houses for each of grade 9 and 10 parents to orient them to the program and to expose them to staff from selected high schools who might be able to answer some of their questions about the complexity of the curriculum, as well as the processes and procedures in dealing with the high schools. In addition, Pathways has organized meetings with grade 12 parents to address their needs for information on post-secondary options and processes including applications, financing (including provincial grants and loans), and Pathways own scholarships and the processes developed to provide this support.

The feedback of the youth themselves, in addition to demonstrating the overwhelmingly positive impact of the program, also led to specific improvements including additional programming such as the weekend retreats which help explore career options and goal development, increasing partnerships with post-secondary institutions to provide exposure to (and credit from) actual college and university courses. These and other additions to the specialty and career mentoring components necessitated an increase in staffing to support program development and implementation of new partnerships.

These are examples of program improvements which were the direct result of feedback elicited through the various surveys and focus groups.

*Policy or Partnership Outcomes.*

Several policy outcomes are similarly a result of the research and success of the program which the research demonstrates. Specifically, as of November 2004, the provincial Ministry of Education has (finally) become a partner with Pathways through a grant to the Program. While only about 15% of the current budget, the commitment represents an acknowledgement that support for community-based approaches is crucial in addressing the challenge of high school dropouts. Indeed, it is important to note that Ministry officials, as well as those at the TDSB, have taken notice of the positive student outcomes demonstrated through the research; in particular, that the current and anticipated dropout rate for Pathways students is not only less than half the rate prior to the program, it is also considerable less than the province-wide average which now exceeds 30%! The Ministry is therefore looking to Pathways for lessons which would positively affect school-based approaches to at risk youth from other communities.

Similarly, the given the success of the young people in Pathways first cohort in gaining acceptances at colleges and universities, and given the demographics of Pathways students and the community, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is also looking to learn from the Program's success at increasing access to post-secondary institutions for "first generation" students (i.e. students who would be the first in their families to attend such programs). These lessons include Pathways ongoing development to increase the capacities of post-secondary institutions to provide the supports required to retain such students and increase the likelihood of their success at college or university; supports which may parallel those provided through Pathways.

While Pathways can hardly take any measure of direct credit, the advocacy of the program, coupled with the clear and positive results, supported the Government in its implementation of a grant, rather than solely loan, program as part of its student awards program. Specifically, beginning in September 2005, OSAP will provide tuition grants to first and, later, second year college and university students which will, in turn, allow Pathways post-secondary awards to be used to encourage continued participation of our students and therefore increase the likelihood of their ultimate success in their post-secondary programs.

At a more local level, changes in school board "policy" or practices influenced by the success of Pathways (and demonstrated by the research) include advocacy which led to changes in homework policy and practice at one school which had, historically, not given homework and thereby communicated an extremely negative view of the students. As well, Pathways work with the TDSB in developing the research and data sharing protocol has been seen as a model of how to track the attainments of students in a variety of initiatives aimed at student success and a model of how such data can be used to assess the effectiveness of these other initiatives.

Beyond the Regent Park community, Pathways has received significant attention as a model program effective in significantly reducing the number dropouts and, by extension, the negative impacts of the stigma associated with economically disadvantaged communities. Evidence for this includes the number of requests for support to replicate the program which has led, in turn, to the establishment of Pathways to Education Canada, an organization with a mandate to explore replication in other communities. Several national corporations are looking to support replication, as are other foundation and individual donors.

### *Dissemination*

The significant research results have been disseminated in a variety of ways. These include presentations to, for example, the National Inner-City Educators Conference (Vancouver; February 2005), the St. Lawrence Forum "*Putting the Health in Health Care*" (April 7, 2005). Additionally, the research results have been reported in articles in the press including

Sue Ferguson "Keeping Kids on Track" (*Maclean's* July 1, 2004)

Carol Goar “A treasure waiting to be shared” (*Toronto Star* August 4, 2004)  
Andrew Duffy, “Paving the way to success” (*Toronto Star* Sept 30, 2004)  
Margaret Wente “Building success, a student at a time” (*Globe and Mail* May 28, 2005)  
“Hour Town” with Adam Vaughn; Featured interviews (CITY-TV; September 7, 2005)  
Featured item, CITY-TV news (September 9, 2005)  
Peter Cheney “Meet the Class of Regent Park '05” (*Globe and Mail* Sept 25,2005)  
Edward Greenspon “The Pathways chance” (*Globe and Mail* Sept 28, 2005)

As well, a professional video, produced by AVhB2b, provides an overview of the research results (through year 5) and has been used as part of the orientation of new volunteer tutors and mentors and for fundraising (required to sustain the program). A total of 500 copies were distributed over the 04/05 year, along with hundreds of brochures and information packages about the program. These forms of dissemination serve many purposes including as invitation for volunteer tutors and mentors, as well as for fundraising to support program delivery.

### **Next Steps**

The research, in part supported by the grant from WCHC, will continue to be used to support continued funding of the program and ongoing program improvement. In the absence of “core” funding from any government agency or department, it remains crucial that the program continue to demonstrate its effectiveness to the many funders whose support appears to be tied to the continued impact of the program. Thus, the research capacity of the program and our commitment to continue to collect basic data remains central to the sustainability of the program.

As well, the results reported to date have excited a number of funders to inquire as to the implications for other communities and initiatives. For example, in the development of a capacity for replication, it is clear that the organization will have to ensure that comparable data is also obtained in each other community seeking to replicate Pathways; and that a commitment to research will be among the criteria for replication which will guide the selection of other communities. Thus, the lessons to date (e.g. on establishing relationships between communities and local school boards) are part of the knowledge transfer that must take place for replication.

Sustaining the initiative and partnerships has several elements. First, the Pathways Development Committee is charged with the task of ensuring the financial sustainability of the program, both in Regent Park and, eventually, in other communities. Given the dependence on the private sector, sustaining the program assumes that the funding partnerships (with corporations, foundations and individuals) have been not only sustained, but nurtured.

Second, Pathways has now formalized the research relationship with the Toronto District School Board which will continue to provide direct downloads of research data on Pathways youth as well the several comparisons. Additional data collection support is being provided to establish the baseline data regarding post-secondary attainments as outlined in the project’s objectives, thus further enhancing the research partnership since it involves not only the TDSB but also data specially provided by OCAS and OUAC. And (as noted above) the TDSB is, following from Pathways data and research process, seeking to increase its capacity and commitment to collecting comparable data to evaluate the impact of several dozen “student success” initiatives across the City.

Third, Pathways is exploring a more extensive research relationship with a major university centre to provide additional research expertise, as well as third party validation of the work to date.

## Lessons Learned

Among the lessons learned, two challenges in particular needed to be addressed. The first was the complexity of securing the necessary data from a student information system which was not, in the words of one TDSB staff member, not designed for research. Specifically, translating the data needs of the Program into the specifications of the SIS required considerable work.

A major aspect of this challenge was the need to ensure the quality and completeness of the data. Experience, initially unsatisfactory, led to important modifications in the protocol and technical aspects of the data sharing. The tasks required both patience and commitment on all sides and, we expect, will continue to do so as the requirements expand to include additional data.

A second aspect of this challenge was timing; that is, the ability of the TDSB to provide the necessary data in a timely manner. As noted, the delay in providing this report was, in large measure a function of the delays in receiving data; indeed, we still have only received part of the data requested. This aspect is largely a function of the lack of capacity within the TDSB and cannot be rectified by the project. However, it has highlighted the need on the part of the TDSB to increase their capacity to meet new demands, less from Pathways and more from Ministry and TDSB reporting requirements.

A second major challenge remains the capacity of the project to meet the demands of other “internal” research and reporting. With only 1FTE researcher and increased demands, particularly for qualitative data, additional research which Pathways would like to undertake is more difficult to schedule. There are several activities which were, in fact, accomplished this year (and with the support of the WCHC grant) including the student, parent, tutor and mentor surveys and focus groups. These need to be continued along with additional work on the factors which have led to the demonstrable success which is Pathways. Therefore, increasing the capacity within the program and creating the necessary partnerships are important challenges.

These lessons need not be lost on others engaged in similar work. First, the “template” for the kinds of data to collect to support evaluations of effectiveness are clear; not only at the level of what indicators are used, but also including the mechanisms by which data can be shared. These are important components to be shared with others.

Second, the commitment to produce research results is clearly important for other community-based programs. The success of Pathways, including, but not limited to the success in funding the program for four years, is (as noted above) at least in part a function of having demonstrated clear success as defined by some important – and understandable – measures. The credibility of the program and, in turn, the ability to influence public policy, in small ways and large, is a direct result of producing what the National Institute for Literacy termed “results that matter”. Developing such results is clearly a function of both the programming offered and the determination to ensure that there are easily identifiable ways for funders and policy makers to understand the results themselves and the implications of these results.

Third, as much as the particular measures are important to demonstrate the aggregate success of the program, program improvement requires continually monitoring and eliciting the perceptions of participants. The data gleaned from survey and focus groups with participants is invaluable in understanding the dynamics and process which lead to program success and the factors which must be addressed, however incrementally, if further improvements are to be incorporated. This involves not only a commitment to improve, but the data from which to identify areas for improvement and ideas to address each area. There are few shortcuts: it is crucial for community-based programs to actively listen to the knowledge gained by participants.

In sum, we are grateful to the Wellesley for the support provided for Pathways research and for its interest in developing the program's research capacity. We expect to continue to develop our research and the partnerships required to sustain it. However, perhaps of greater importance is that the success and sustainability of the Pathways program itself is a function of the ability of to advocate for longer-term and community-based approaches to youth engagement. Sustainability, in turn, will be a function of the ability and willingness of governments – at all level – to support such longer-term and comprehensive approaches, rather than the short term “fixes” which have characterized the field to date and have proven so wanting in addressing the needs of our youth. While Pathways has, we believe, made an important contribution to six of the seven public policy areas identified in the proposal, our ability to advocate for increased integration of government funding and programs has been limited to date. It is, however, likely to be the subject of ongoing efforts as Pathways continues to be a model program.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> One example of some success in this regard is the formation of a group to lobby all three levels of government for more integrated programming and funding for second language learners. The group formed as a result of a forum following the Atkinson fellowship series by Andrew Duffy which highlighted Pathways as one of three particularly effective programs across the country. Our participation in the forum was certainly not the determining factor in the development of that group; but, rather, one of several voices – and one with substantial data behind it – to support the need for a more concerted approach to supporting second language students since Pathways has clearly been able to demonstrate that their success is, at least in part, a function of the supports provided.

Appendix 1: Data for the Pathways to Education Program

**TABLE 1**

Mean absenteeism rates and the proportion of students absent from 15% or more of school days for

Grade	Historical Regent Park Cohort A		Pathways Cohort 1		Pathways Cohort 2		Pathways Cohort 3	
	Mean	15+	Mean	15+	Mean	15+	Mean	15+
9	10.8%	24.4%	7.4%	13.2%	6.2%	13.0%	4.3%	5.6%
10	18.6%	35.3%	8.8%	19.8%	5.6%	10.4%		
11*	15.9%	35.1%	8.5%	20.2%				

Pathways students and the Regent Park historical cohort A

\*Historical cohort B

**TABLE 2**

One-sample t -tests comparing Pathways students' absenteeism rates with the general student population at the five main Toronto high schools - 2003-2004

Grade	Population Mean	Pathways Mean	N	d.f.	Mean Difference	t
9	8.6%	4.3%	160	159	-4.4%	-9.65***
10	12.1%	5.6%	144	143	-6.5%	-10.04***
11	11.4%	8.5%	89	88	-2.9%	-2.91**

\*\*\*p≤.001 \*\*p≤.01 \*p≤.05

**TABLE 3**

Mean absenteeism rates of male and female Pathways students and their peers at the five main schools - 2003-04

Grade	Absenteeism Rate					
	Male			Female		
	Pathways	Comparison	Effect Size	Pathways	Comparison	Effect Size
9	4.8% (N=86)	9.9% (N=444)	-.43	3.6% (N=74)	9.0% (N=258)	-.42
10	5.0% (N=63)	15.0% (N=454)	-.67	6.1% (N=81)	10.8% (N=287)	-.37
11	7.4% (N=41)	12.1% (N=453)	-.37	9.5% (N=48)	11.2% (N=336)	-.13

**TABLE 4**

Comparing Male and Female Pathways Students' Absenteeism Rate (15%+) to their peers at the Five Main Schools - 2003-04

	Male Students		Female Students	
	Pathways	Comparison	Pathways	Comparison
Grade 9	7.0 (N=86)	22.5% (N=444)	4.1% (N=74)	19.4% (N=258)
Grade 10	7.9% (N=63)	38.8% (N=454)	12.3% (N=81)	23.7% (N=287)
Grade 11	14.6% (N=41)	31.8% (N=453)	25.0% (N=48)	28.0% (N=336)

**TABLE 5**

One-sample t –tests comparing Pathways students' credit accumulation with the general student population at the five main Toronto high schools – 2003-2004

Grade	Population Mean	Pathways Mean	N	d.f.	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>
9	6.0	7.1	160	159	1.0	8.40***
10	11.3	13.3	141	140	2.0	6.48***
11	18.2	20.5	89	88	2.3	4.28***

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$  \*\* $p \leq .01$  \* $p \leq .05$

**TABLE 6**

Comparing credit accumulation of Pathways cohorts 1 and 2 to pre-Pathways historical Regent Park cohort A, grades 9 and 10

Credits Accumulated	Cohort 2 - Grs 9 & 10 (N=141)	Cohort 1 - Grs 9 & 10 (N=86)	Pre-Pathways Regent Park Cohort A (Grs 9 & 10) (N=108)
All credits (15.5+)	45.4% (n=64)	45.3% (n=39)	35.2% (n=38)
1 credit short (14.5-15.0)	10.6% (n=15)	11.6% (n=10)	13.0% (n=14)
2 credits short (13.5-14.0)	12.1% (n=17)	10.5% (n=9)	3.7% (n=4)
3 credits short (12.5-13.0)	2.8% (n=4)	8.1% (n=7)	1.8% (n=2)
4 credits short (11.5-12.0)	7.8% (n=11)	4.7% (n=4)	3.7% (n=4)
5 credits short (10.5-11.0)	2.8% (n=4)	4.7% (n=4)	0
6+credits short (0 to 10 credits)	18.4% (n=26)	15.1% (n=13)	42.6% (n=46)

**TABLE 7**

Three year credit accumulation comparing Pathways cohort 1 to pre-Pathways historical Regent Park Cohort B

Credits Accumulated	Pathways Students Grade 11 (N=89)	Regent Park Cohort B Grade 11 (N=99)
22.5+ (all credits)	52.8% (N=47)	38.4% (N=38)
20.5 to 22 (1 - 2.5 credits short)	14.6% (N=14)	7.1% (N=7)
18.5 to 20 (3 - 4.5 credits short)	9.0% (N=8)	10.1% (N=7)
15.5 to 18 (5 - 7.5 credits short)	7.9% (N=7)	14.1% (N=14)
0 to 15 credits	15.7% (N=14)	30.3% (N=30)

**TABLE 8**

Credit accumulation of Pathways students and their peers at the five main schools by gender - Grade 11, 2003-04

Credit accumulation	Male students			Female Students		
	Pathways (N=41)	Comparison (N=452)	Effect Size	Pathways (N=48)	Comparison (N=333)	Effect Size
Mean number of credits	20.3 (SD=5.0)	17.7 (SD=6.5)	.41	20.6 (SD=5.2)	18.2 (SD=6.6)	.37
All credits (22.5+)	48.8% (N=20)	35.4% (N=160)		56.3% (N=27)	38.7% (N=129)	
8+ credits short (0 - 15 credits)	17.1% (N=7)	32.5% (N=147)		14.6% (N=7)	30.0% (N=100)	

**TABLE 9**

Credit accumulation of Pathways students and their peers at the five main schools by gender - Grade 10, 2003-04

Credit accumulation	Male students			Female Students		
	Pathways (N=62)	Comparison (N=451)	Effect Size	Pathways (N=79)	Comparison (N=287)	Effect Size
Mean number of credits	13.6 (SD=3.0)	10.4 (SD=5.4)	.62	13.1 (SD=4.2)	11.7 (SD=4.8)	.30
All credits (15.5+)	41.9% (N=26)	29.1% (N=131)		48.1% (N=38)	33.4% (N=96)	
6+ credits short (0 - 10 credits)	16.1% (N=10)	43.8% (N=197)		20.3% (N=16)	35.9% (N=103)	

**TABLE 10**

Credit accumulation of Pathways students and their peers at the five main schools by gender - Grade 9, 2003-04

Credit accumulation	Male students			Female Students		
	Pathways (N=87)	Comparison (N=410)	Effect Size	Pathways (N=73)	Comparison (N=236)	Effect Size
Mean number of credits	6.8 (SD=1.8)	5.5 (SD=3.0)	.46	7.4 (SD=1.2)	6.2 (SD=2.6)	.51
All credits (7.5+)	55.2% (N=48)	45.6% (N=187)		74.0% (N=54)	54.7% (N=129)	
3+ credits short (0 - 5 credits)	25.3% (N=22)	38.8% (N=159)		6.8% (N=5)	29.2% (N=69)	