

Beyond 3:30 — A Holistic After-school Program for Inner-city Middle Schools: Immediate, Lifelong, and Ripple Effects

Prepared by Maria Yau & Ryan Romard*

About the Program

Beyond 3:30 (B3:30) is a multi-purpose after school program designed to meet the needs of middle school students in high priority neighborhoods. It was created in response to the findings of the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) first *Student Census* (2006), which indicates that students from low-income communities faced significant opportunity gaps in terms of homework support, physical health, and enrichment activities, with implications for both educational and well-being outcomes. Additionally, the Toronto Community Foundation's 2009 *Vital Signs Toronto Report* calls for affordable, high-quality after-school programs in low-income neighbourhoods after finding the high likelihood of unsupervised youth in these communities to engage in gang-related or delinquent behavior or to become victims of crime themselves.

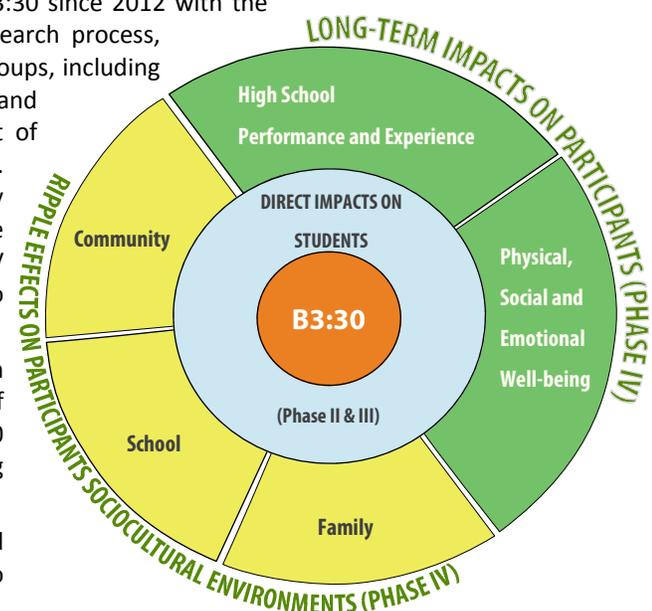
As part of the TDSB's Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) program, B3:30 was piloted at seven MSIC schools in 2009-10, growing to 18 schools five years later. By 2014-15, over 400 students from high needs, inner-city neighbourhoods were engaged in enriched and healthy activities every day after school. The program, which was offered on school premises directly after the school day (from 3:30pm to 6:30pm) during the school week, had four key program components.

- **Homework Club** — provided participants a supportive environment for homework and other academic support under supervision of program staff for about 45 minutes every day
- **Junior Chefs' Club** — taught cooking skills and nutritional knowledge, and gave students opportunities to take turns preparing healthy snacks and meals for fellow participants
- **Sports and recreation** — was led by recreation and program staff to allow students to enjoy and learn different physical activities and skills, including organized sports and games
- **Specialty programs** — consisted of a variety of activities and training in music, drama, and life skills such as leadership, financial literacy and babysitting, most of which were undertaken with local community partners

About the Research

The TDSB's Research Department conducted four phases of evaluation on B3:30 since 2012 with the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Education. Throughout the research process, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from different stakeholder groups, including program staff, student teachers placed in the program, school staff and administration, parents, current participants, and former participants (most of whom were in Grades 10 and 11 at the time of the final Phase IV Evaluation). As illustrated in the diagram, Phase II and III Evaluations reveal many immediate benefits for program participants in terms of academic performance and well-being. Building on the results of this prior research, the Phase IV Evaluation involved tracking and interviewing former program participants to determine *whether* and *how* B3:30 had any:

1. **Long term impacts** on students after they graduated from the program and transitioned into high school: Were there lasting impacts in terms of academic performance and school experience in high school? Did B3:30 help students develop into healthier, stronger, more resilient and caring youth?
2. **Ripple effects** on the social and cultural environments around participants: Did the beneficial impacts of B3:30 on students spill over to cause lasting changes in their surrounding school communities, families, and neighborhoods and communities?



*This document summarizes key findings from the multi-phase B3:30 evaluation reports. The final summative report (Phase IV) is authored by Yau, M., Archer, B., Walter, S., Bonsu, V., & Sauriol, D. (2015) and is available at: www.tdsb.on.ca/research/Research/Publications/StudentEngagementandExperiences

Impacts on Student Performance and School Engagement

Academic Performance

Many students entering B3:30 experienced higher levels of academic risk. Multiple data sources show notable gaps in reading, writing, math and learning skills between B3:30 participants and non-participants. B3:30's daily Homework Club provided students direct academic support by trained staff in a favourable environment to complete their school assignments. Program staff also offered additional academic assistance to students by helping them to address areas of difficulty or teaching them new learning strategies.

Tracking data shows the contribution of B3:30 to a narrowing of the academic achievement gap in terms of learning skills, reading, and writing.



Students' self-ratings of their grades and effort level at school consistently improved each year after B3:30. Middle school students surveyed reported that through B3:30 they learned a lot about reading (82%), writing (87%), math (79%), and study skills (84%). Two thirds (66%) of former B3:30 students agreed that the improvement in their numeracy and literacy skills due to the program lasted into high school.

Engagement in School

According to both school and program staff, before entering B3:30, many students experienced behavioral and attendance issues, low levels of school enjoyment, and little engagement in class or at school. Students explained that participating in B3:30 helped them develop more positive attitudes towards school, engage more in school life, and become more serious about their education. Student's self-ratings for attendance and enjoyment of school were consistently higher after participating in B3:30. Program as well as school staff also noted improvements in attendance and school behavior of their B3:30 students.

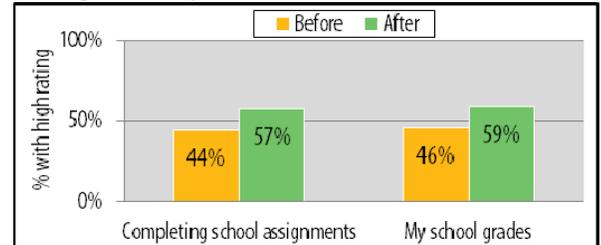
Furthermore, most former students found that B3:30 helped them develop useful presentation and public speaking skills (76%) and made them more inclined to participate in class (80%) even when they were in high school. The majority of former B3:30 students (80%) also confirmed that the program made them want to be more active in extra-curricular activities in secondary school. Finally, many of them revealed during interviews that participating in B3:30 gave them both the confidence and opportunities they needed to cultivate better relationships with teachers and other adults in school.

Transition into High School and Beyond

Overall, as a result of the combined academic impacts of B3:30, participants were better prepared to transition into high school. This could be attributed specifically to the gains previously mentioned, including better work habits and learning skills, academic improvements, and more focused and serious attitudes towards education. The majority of former B3:30 students (82%) believed that due to their B3:30 experiences, they could cope with the academic demands of secondary school.

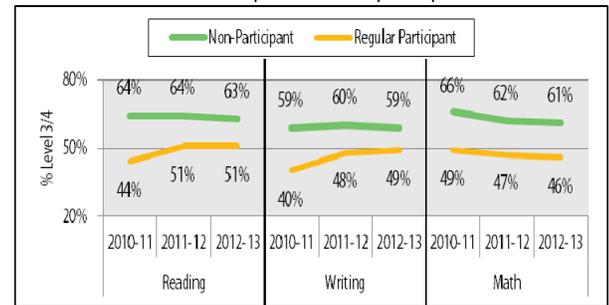
The long-term academic impacts of B3:30 had likely extended even beyond high school. Students and program staff described how B3:30 encouraged students to develop their post-secondary aspirations regarding career and educational choices by providing guidance and role models. Most former participants (82%) in high school concurred that B3:30 influenced their desire to pursue post-secondary education. Some of them were even inspired to choose career paths similar to B3:30 program staff, such as teaching or social work.

Assignment Completion and Grades, Before and After B3:30



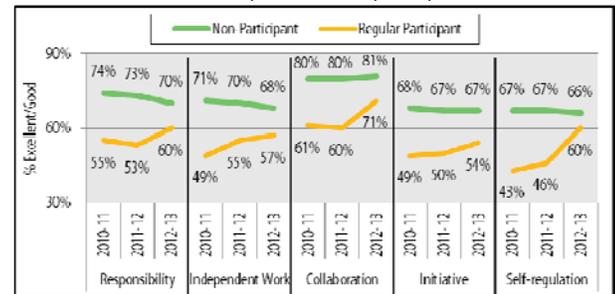
Source: B3:30 Year-end survey for participants, Spring 2015

3-year Elementary Report Card Results (Reading, Writing, Math): B3:30 Participants vs. Non-participants



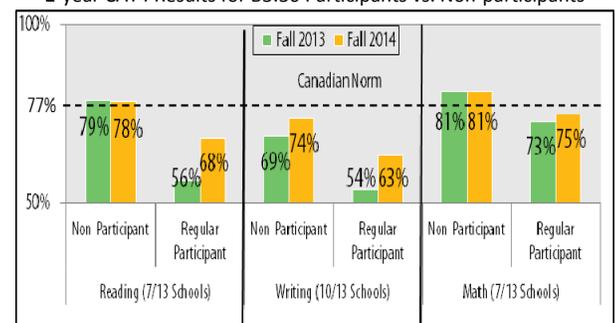
Source: Elementary report cards

3-year Elementary Report Card Results (Learning Skills): B3:30 Participants vs. Non-participants



Source: Elementary report cards

2-year CAT4 Results for B3:30 Participants vs. Non-participants



Source: MSIC'S CAT4 Data, 2013-14

They'd always ask me what school I went to. [...] They were asking me about university and they were asking me like, how do they get into that? Or what would they have to do to go to university? (Site Co-ordinator)

Impacts on Student Well-being

Physical Development

Adolescents from high priority communities were more likely than their peers from other neighbourhoods to face challenges to their physical well-being and development. Unhealthy dietary habits, low nutritional knowledge, and food insecurity were commonly cited concerns. These adolescents were also less likely to get enough physical activity and had reduced opportunities to participate in organized sports outside of school.

B3:30 helped students become healthier by exposing them to daily physical activities in a flexible, supportive, and fun setting. Students consistently reported better physical fitness after participating in B3:30. In the long-term, former B3:30 students in high school agreed that they placed greater importance on physical fitness and had more interest in physical activity or sports because of B3:30.

At the same time, B3:30's Junior Chefs' Club made an immediate physical impact on students by providing them with healthy meals to meet their nutritional needs. Participants clearly indicated that the program improved their knowledge of nutrition and ability to prepare food. The majority of former participants (82%) further stated that the cooking skills and nutritional knowledge that they acquired in B3:30 remained beneficial for them in high school.

Social Development

Some students in high needs communities faced increased difficulty with common social challenges such as making new friends and interacting with school adults. This was especially true for students who were transitioning to new schools or whose families were new to Canada. B3:30 provided participants with a non-threatening and pro-social environment outside of regular class time for students to interact with others.

Year-end participant surveys showed consistently boosted self-ratings in communication and social skills. Students revealed that their time in B3:30 allowed them to expand their social circles, develop deeper friendships, and gain more confidence in interacting with school adults in middle school. Most (84%) former B3:30 students agreed that the social skills they acquired in B3:30 made it easier for them to build positive social relationships in high school. Students also learned to deal with interpersonal conflict in healthy and constructive ways. Survey data demonstrated an obvious increase in those who rated themselves highly in dealing with conflict after participating in B3:30. In secondary school, over three quarters of the former B3:30 participants (76%) surveyed indicated that the program had helped them develop conflict resolution skills that were useful in the long-term.

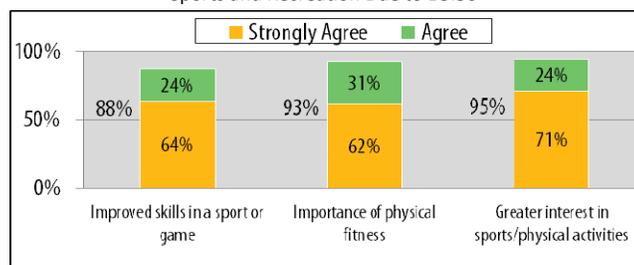
Emotional Development

Interviews with stakeholder groups revealed many emotional challenges faced by inner-city adolescents due to adverse circumstances at home or in the community. School and program staff commonly cited issues such as anger, stress, loneliness, poor judgement, and low self-esteem.

The daily mentorship and role modeling of B3:30 staff positively guided the emotional development and maturation of participants over the course of the program. Year-end surveys and interviews with students show steady improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence after participating in B3:30. Many participants reported feeling happier with themselves and experiencing lower levels of loneliness following their time in B3:30.

In the long run, as a result of B3:30, former participants found themselves happier, and becoming more resilient, confident, and caring people. Many former participants (78%) agreed that participating in the program produced lasting gains to their self-confidence into high school. The overwhelming majority of them (88%) also affirmed that their past experience in B3:30 influenced them to become more compassionate and understanding people. Most (82%) further agreed that B3:30 allowed them to develop better decision making and life choice skills that were important when dealing with teenage challenges during their secondary school years.

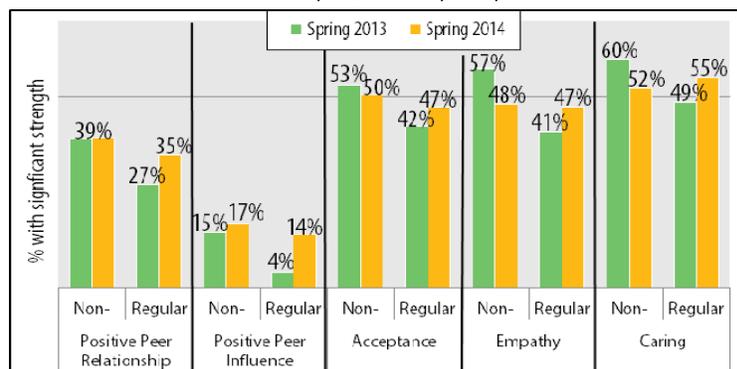
Sports and Recreation Due to B3:30



Source: B3:30 former participant survey, Spring 2015



2-year Resiliency Survey (Social Areas):
B3:30 Participants vs. Non-participants



Source: MSIC's Resiliency Survey Data, Spring 2013 & 2014

I would just be very angry at anything and everything; the smallest things would upset me [...] I'd always let my emotions get the better of me, especially back then because my emotions controlled me so, I wasn't able to let it go or be at peace with certain things that I could not change. So I feel like that if I didn't go to B3:30, I would probably be a very angry person. (Former Participant)

Ripple Effects

School Community

Research findings illustrate that B3:30's beneficial impacts on students also generated positive ripple effects at the whole school level. By promoting pro-social behaviors and encouraging students to develop better relationships with their peers and school adults, B3:30 developed a healthier sense of school community. B3:30 fostered a more positive school environment by boosting student enjoyment, engagement, and attendance, as well as reducing behavioral difficulties. School and program staff noted a tendency for B3:30 students to act as leaders by modelling the positive behaviors and attitudes they developed during the program to their peers. Most former participants (83%) agreed that B3:30 had a lasting impact by making them want to behave well in school. The program also helped create closer connections between parents and school through its regular Community Dinners to bring families together at school sites to celebrate their children's progress in the program.

I think [B3:30 has] had a positive impact on the school climate. I think it helps creates an atmosphere where the school is a community school. We are not called that, but a community feeling where after hours there are things going on at school. [...] It creates a feeling that there is a lot of learning happening after the traditional hours of school. (School Principal)

Families

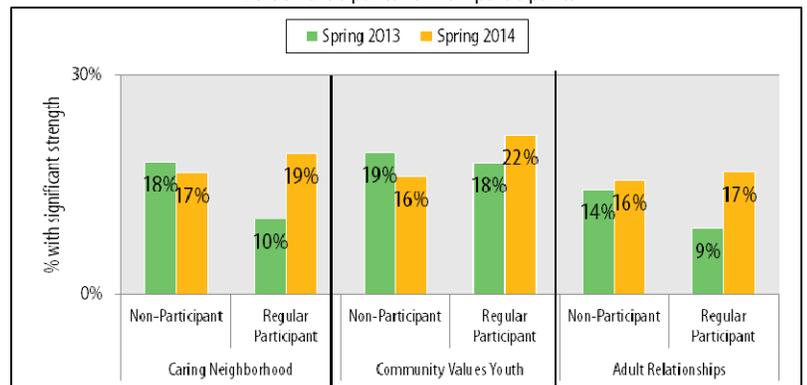
B3:30 also benefitted the lives of families alongside students. Parents explained that due to B3:30, their children were more likely to help out at home with chores, particularly meal preparation and clean up, due to the skills and habits they acquired in the Junior Chefs' Club. Students and parents alike stated that B3:30 enabled more quality family time after school because homework was already done, freeing up time and eliminating a common source of stress for families. Students also found that B3:30 led to more conversations and sharing with their parents about the things that they learned, enjoyed, or experienced in the program. In fact, 71% of former participants believed that because of B3:30, they developed more open and positive relationships with parents lasting into high school.

For my daughter, our relationship has gotten stronger because when she comes home she doesn't have to focus on homework because homework is done. So we get to talk, we get to build a relationship. (Parent)

Neighborhoods

B3:30 contributed to a greater sense of community safety by providing adolescents with a safe, comfortable place to be after school. Most former participants (85%) stated that the program helped them avoid bad influences and stay out of trouble in their neighbourhoods when they were in high school. B3:30 also produced a better sense of community among students and their families. Youth in the community developed broader and deeper social networks, while B3:30's Community Dinners connected families with each other. Participants grew to perceive their communities as more caring, valuing and respecting youth more, and having more positive adult-youth relationships. Improvements in student engagement also carried over into the community, as 67% of the former B3:30 students in high school agreed that it made them want to become more involved in their communities. In fact, several former participants had returned to their former middle schools as volunteers to support their younger counterparts in B3:30.

2-year Resiliency Survey (Community Cohesiveness):
B3:30 Participants vs. Non-participants



MSIC's Resiliency Survey Data, Spring 2013 & 2014

Value of B3:30

The 4-year evaluation shows that B3:30 had multiple immediate and lifelong benefits for students. Tracking the early B3:30 cohort through to high school demonstrates that the program not only helped them improve their academic performance and transition into high school, it also led many of them to develop into healthier, stronger, and more caring individuals who became more resilient and able to overcome life challenges. At the same time, its positive ripple effects on school communities, families, and neighbourhoods speak to its long-term and sociocultural impacts. In short, B3:30 can be seen as a cost-effective investment that could yield immediate, long-lasting, as well as far-reaching benefits for inner-city adolescents and people around them.

Factors for Program Success and Sustainability

In addition to uncovering the multiple impacts of B3:30, the final evaluation also identifies seven factors for ensuring the continued success and sustainability of the program:

A holistic program design

Skilled and caring program staff

Support from the host schools

Community partnerships

Central co-ordination and support

Ongoing research and evaluation

Sustainable funding