



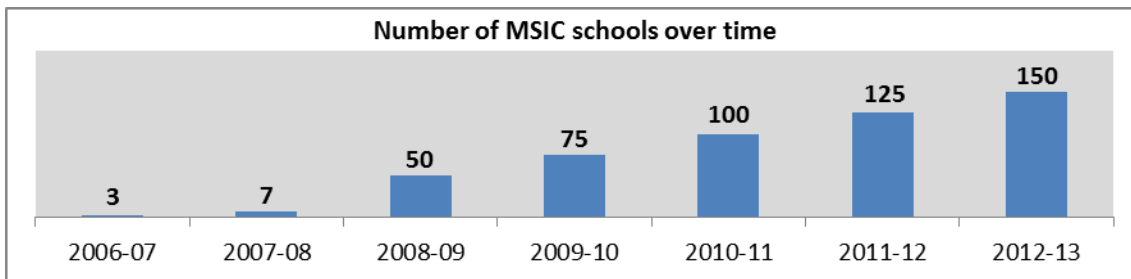
Model Schools for Inner Cities: A 10-Year Overview

Prepared by Maria Yau, Bryce Archer & Ryan Romard

History and Background of the Program

In 2006, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) launched its Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) program, in response to the Board's Inner City Task Force Report (2005), which called for a systemic approach to addressing the impact of poverty on student outcomes and the issue of achievement gaps experienced by historically marginalized groups. According to the Task Force's recommendations, extra funding from the Ministry of Education's Learning Opportunity Grant (LOG) should be allocated to schools in high priority neighbourhoods. The rationale was to provide these schools with additional resources and intentional supports in order to "level the playing field for all students regardless of their socio-economic circumstance or cultural background", to enable "students to achieve academically, socially and emotionally to their highest potential", and to allow students to "leave school with the skills and confidence that position them to compete equally in the broader world".¹

In 2006-07, three inner-city schools in high needs communities were identified as the first MSIC pilot sites. In the second year, another four inner-city schools were added. The third year (2008-09) witnessed sharing of MSIC resources and funds initially granted to the seven MSIC schools with their neighbouring schools, resulting in the formation of seven clusters of 50 MSIC schools. Since then, each subsequent school year, until 2012-13, saw an addition of 25 more MSIC schools based on the Board's Learning Opportunity Index (LOI). By 2012-13, the number of MSIC schools reached 150, serving over 56,000 students from neighbourhoods with the highest levels of external challenges.



Structure and Governance

A central MSIC Office, headed by a Superintendent of Education with a Central Co-ordinating Principal and a support team, was created to manage, lead and co-ordinate resource allocations, programming, community liaisons, and accountability for the 150 MSIC schools in the seven clusters. Each cluster also formed a committee with members comprised of Superintendents and Principals, along with one Lead Teacher, two MSIC Teaching and Learning Coaches and three Community Support Workers, who offered direct support to their respective MSIC schools and school communities.

¹ TDSB Model Schools For Inner City Task Force Report, 2005, pp.4-5

In addition, an Inner City Advisory Committee (ICAC) was established with representatives from various stakeholder groups including trustees, school superintendents, principals, unions, parents, faculties of education, and community and government agencies. The ICAC also monitored the progress of the MSIC program, dealt with ongoing inner-city issues such as LOG and LOI funding, and liaised with other levels of government to address related social policy and broader funding issues.

MSIC's Five Essential Components

According to the Inner City Task Force recommendations, all MSIC schools were to be guided by five essential components:

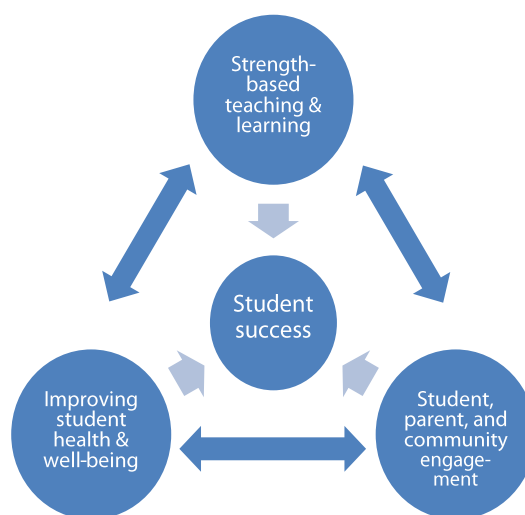
1. *Innovation in teaching and learning practice and school structure* – to support improved academic performance through enriched experiential learning opportunities, creativity and critical thinking emphasis, social justice curriculum, and culturally responsive pedagogies. This included MSIC Learning Coaches, special MSIC curricular units, summer schools for MSIC students, a partnership with the Ontario Science Centre, and innovation pilot projects such as I2Q.
2. *Support services to meet students' physical, social, and emotional needs* – with the use of multidisciplinary approaches such as nutrition programs, annual hearing and vision assessment, Model Schools Paediatric Health Initiative (MSPHI in-school health clinics), and Beyond 3:30 - an extended after-school program for MSIC middle and senior school students.
3. *School as the heart of the community* – through establishing active partnerships with parents, community members, and community organizations. Some examples were Community and Faith Walks for school staff, Family Adventure Passports, Parents Reaching Out Grants, and MSIC's Parent Academy.
4. *Research, review, and evaluation of students and programs* – through annual data collection and reporting to drive continuous school improvement, and summative evaluation to ensure accountability. This included yearly implementation of the Early Development Instrument (EDI), Canadian Achievement Test (CAT4), Resiliency Survey, and MSIC school surveys.
5. *Commitment to share successful practices* – such as innovative strategies, initiatives, and structures - with other schools, outside of the Board, and educators from different countries.

MSIC's Program Philosophy

The program philosophy of the MSIC centered on an integrated, holistic, and equitable approach to supporting highest need students with an emphasis on:

- adopting a strength-based teaching and learning environment
- fostering student well-being including relationship building, and
- enhancing student, parent, and community engagement.

Under these premises and the five essential components, along with the provision of additional resources and direct support from MSIC central staff, MSIC schools offered a variety of innovative and equity-based programs and services to meet the specific needs of their students and local communities. While individual schools had their unique school programming plans, all MSIC schools had to undergo a common annual research and review process, which helped inform them of their school's ongoing needs and progress, and reinforce their MSIC commitment and accountability.

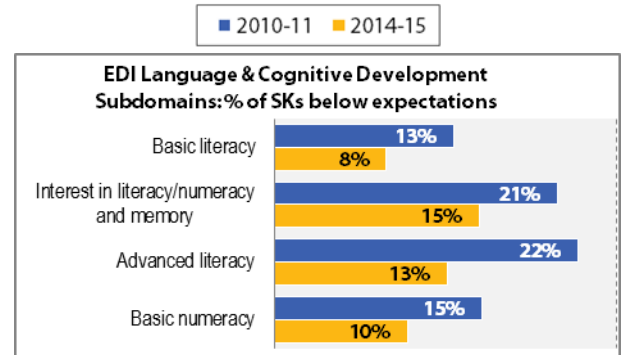


Impacts of the MSIC Program on Student Success

Over a decade of data collection and research have demonstrated that the MSIC program has made a profoundly positive impact on the lives of many students. Through its multiple programs, students' basic needs were met and overall well-being improved. For instance, it was found that opportunity gaps for disadvantaged students were reduced as a result of such enrichment initiatives as the Beyond 3:30 after-school program² and in-school health clinics³. In addition, the collective MSIC's intentional and intensive programming efforts have led to important academic gains. Using multiple outcome indicators, measures and data sources, as well as multi-year longitudinal tracking, TDSB's research has shown a narrowing of achievement gaps for MSIC students.

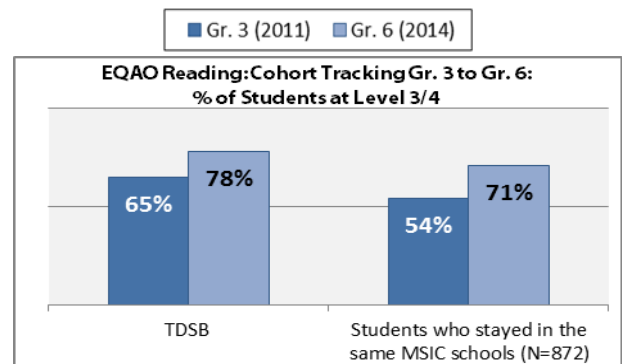
Early years

A comparison of system-wide EDI data indicates a notable reduction in the school readiness gap between MSIC Senior Kindergarten (SK) children and their non-MSIC counterparts over time. Across MSIC schools, a substantial reduction in academic risk was observed in terms of literacy and numeracy. In fact, a recent (2015) EDI assessment points to significant improvements among MSIC children especially in the Language and Cognitive Development domain.

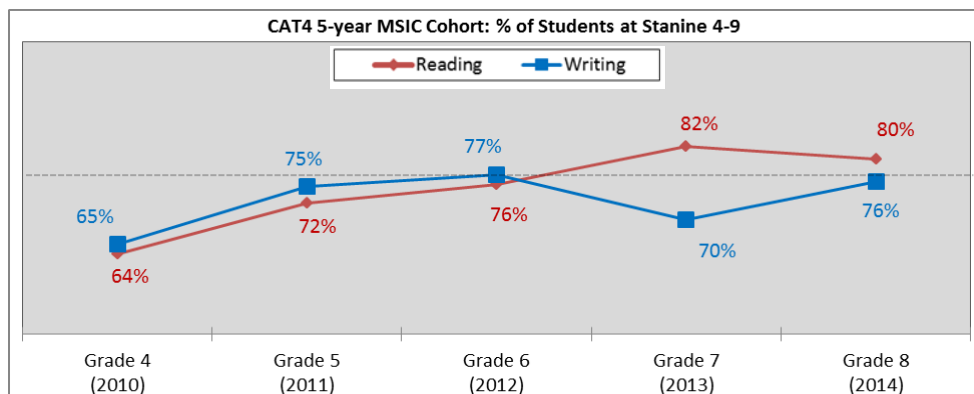


Elementary school years

Though there was a significant achievement gap between MSIC students and the overall TDSB population in the provincial Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Grade 3 reading test, the discrepancy had reduced when these students reached Grade 6. Tracking a cohort of MSIC students further revealed that while the proportion of TDSB population achieving Level 3 or 4 rose by 13 percentage points from Grade 3 to Grade 6, the corresponding increase for MSIC students was 17 percentage points.



Every fall, all MSIC schools administered CAT4 - a standardized test to gauge the foundational skills of students in Grades 2 to 8. Tracking MSIC students' CAT4 results between 2010 and 2014 shows their yearly progress from well below the Canadian norm in Grade 4 to reaching or surpassing the norm by Grade 8 before graduating to secondary school.

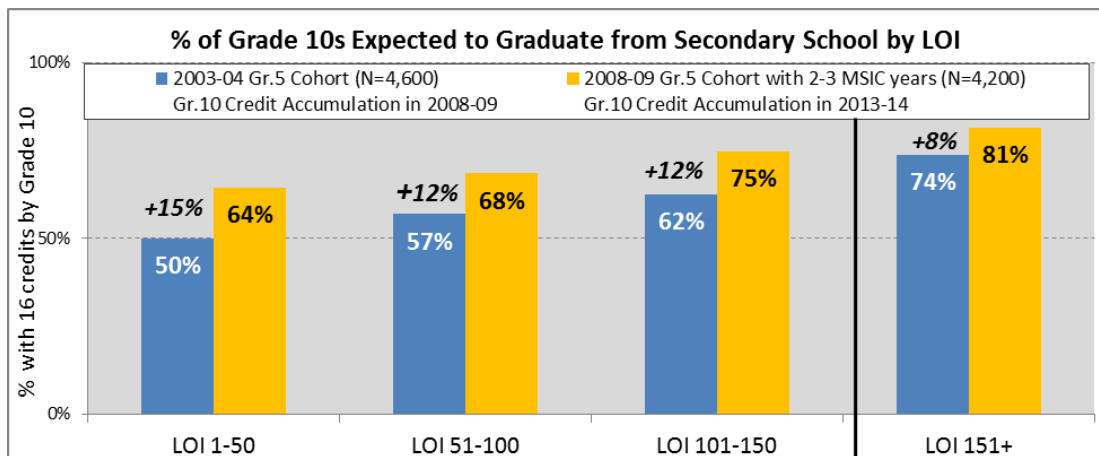


²Yau, M., et al. (2015). *Beyond 3:30: A Multi-purpose After-school Program for Inner-city Middle Schools, Phase VI Evaluation*.

³Yau, M., et al. (2015). *Model Schools Paediatric Health Initiatives: In-school Health Clinics, Phase VI Summative Evaluation*.

Lasting gains into secondary school

Although MSIC was not offered in the secondary school panel (except for a few years), following MSIC students beyond their elementary years sheds light on the long-term impacts of the program. As illustrated in the chart below, historically students from lower LOI schools were much *less* likely to have accumulated 16 credits by Grade 10, an indicator of students being on track to graduate from secondary school. For instance, prior to the existence of the MSIC program, only 50% of the students from the lowest 50 LOI schools, compared to 74% of those from the more prosperous and least challenged (LOI 151 or above) schools, were likely to graduate. However, tracking of the first MSIC cohort indicates that 64% of MSIC students were likely to graduate, which was significantly higher than their predecessors (50%). In fact, as shown in the chart below, the percentage point increase made by the MSIC students was noticeably greater than that of the higher LOI schools. In other words, the achievement gap had narrowed for students from MSIC schools.



Conditions for Success

While longitudinal tracking shows academic gains among MSIC students over time, the degree of progress made by individual MSIC schools varied according to the level and the unique set of external challenges (e.g., socio-economic circumstances) faced by each school community, the initial academic standing (baseline) of the students in different schools, and the internal organizational structure (e.g., leadership and staff turnover) of individual schools.

Nonetheless, the multi-year research on MSIC has clearly demonstrated that as a whole high needs schools - no matter how challenging - can help bring about positive change for students, and can narrow the opportunity and subsequently the achievement gaps *so long as* the school has, or is provided with, the following six conditions.

Sustainable additional supports and resources to close opportunity gaps and level the playing field

Extra efforts and innovative pedagogies to reduce the wide achievement gap

Sufficient time for schools and students to demonstrate growth

Ongoing research and review to help schools monitor ongoing needs and progress, and adjust planning and practices

Visionary leadership and committed staff at both the school and system levels

Continuous efforts and resources to address recurring or changing external challenges