

# **The City School Partnership:** A Community-Built Response to Improving Access to Education | Final Research Report (August 15, 2019)

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 **City School**  
by  **МОШАШК**

## **A final report by:**

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## Executive summary

Mohawk College is pleased to submit this final report on *The City School Partnership: A Community-Built Response to Improving Access to Education (2016-2019)* a research project funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (SSHRC) College and Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF). The City School Partnership represents a multi-sectoral approach to poverty-reduction through improving access to education for residents in low-income neighbourhoods in the City of Hamilton.

City School by Mohawk represents a significant extension of Mohawk College's institutional commitment to removing barriers to education at the community level. The aim of City School is to reduce the barriers that residents face in accessing a postsecondary education and to facilitate their progress to further courses of study. Central to achieving this is an innovative, place-based methodology, one which draws upon the strengths and capacities of the community in achieving collective impact. In bringing college classrooms to the community, the goal of City School is to help raise the postsecondary and employment aspirations of residents.

The research has provided us with an invaluable opportunity to investigate the efficacy of City School and its impact in the community. In addition to informing the College's access and engagement policy, and bolstering the capacity of the College to engage in social innovation research, the research has contributed to a growing body of evidence exploring the utilization of community hubs in addressing the postsecondary needs of residents. Our research results indicate that City School has become part of a citywide conversation on poverty in the City of Hamilton. Furthermore, City School has emerged as an exemplary best practice model of community engagement for postsecondary institutions elsewhere. Built upon a foundation of community engagement, City School continues to evolve to meet the needs of residents and our community partners.

The report details the research process employed and findings obtained through the three-year duration of the project. Interviews were conducted with City School students, faculty, former City School students who have transitioned to a program of study at the College, and individuals representing the City School Partnership. The range of perspectives that the interview sample brings to bear on the workings of City School is detailed in the report. Throughout the research process, the focus has been on the views and perceptions of participants.

Interviews with students illustrate the confidence-building effects of their participation in City School programming. Having the opportunity to take a course in a convenient and familiar neighbourhood-based setting allows residents to explore their postsecondary aspirations without having to struggle with, or definitively overcome, the barriers and challenges they have faced in the past in accessing a postsecondary education. Faculty interviews illustrate how the City School classroom environment engages and empowers students. In encouraging students to take an active role in their education, the supportive learning environment that faculty foster provides students with a taste of the postsecondary experience while nurturing their academic skills.

The research has also provided us with data regarding the experiences of City School students now studying at Mohawk. To this end, a crucial test of the efficacy of City School is the extent to which it prepares students for success when enrolled in a further program of postsecondary study. Preliminary data indicates the necessity of tracking and providing ongoing support to students. Finally, interviews with representatives of our partner organizations reveal the collaborative foundations of City School and the relationship of trust and reciprocity that has emerged to strengthen the heart of the City School Partnership. The intrinsically multi-sectoral nature of the partnership involves balancing a range of complementary partner agendas and mandates in order to achieve collective impact. Above all, interviews with partners indicate their appetite and enthusiasm to remain active participants in a dialogue centred on increasing access to postsecondary for low-income residents. In maintaining this, ongoing collaboration, commitment, and communication remain key imperatives.

Notwithstanding the early successes of City School and the promise of the model, working to connect residents living in underserved neighbourhoods with viable pathways to education remains challenging. In light of this, our report concludes with a number of recommendations for the future direction and growth of City School programming. Above all, the research demonstrates that City School has been built upon a foundation of strength. That this is the case is due to the dedication and passion of the Community Access and Engagement team at Mohawk. Their efforts have ensured that City School has been designed in a manner that is respectful and responsive to the needs of residents and community, and have helped place the College on the right path towards making a postsecondary education a viable and realistic aspiration for low-income residents in the City of Hamilton.

## Introduction

The guiding rationale of this report is to describe and reflect upon the findings resulting from *The City School Partnership: A Community-Built Response to Improving Access to Education (2016-2019)*, a research project funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (SSHRC) College and Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF). The *City School Partnership* is a community-driven, evidence-based, and multi-sectoral research and training response to poverty and a lack of accessible education in the City of Hamilton, Ontario. Central to the project is an investigation of the efficacy of *City School by Mohawk* in creating accessible pathways to postsecondary education for residents in the City's priority neighbourhoods.

We report on interview data gathered from City School students, faculty who have taught a City School course, City School students who have transitioned to a program of study at Mohawk College, and on interviews conducted with representatives from our community partners. The report builds upon and extends a research trajectory that began with an Ontario Council of Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) funded study titled *Pathway Transfer to Postsecondary: Exploring the Connection between Tuition-Free Credit Courses and Postsecondary Studies* (Atkinson, Ecker, Shearer, Soluk, Vanderveken, and Bourke, 2017).

## Statement of purpose

The purpose of this report is to document the research achievements of the project and provide recommendations for expanding and sustaining City School by Mohawk. Through the research, we primarily sought to develop a greater understanding of the barriers that residents face in accessing postsecondary, how the initiative helps to facilitate the transition of students to further courses of study and, more broadly, explore the community impact and workings of the City School Partnership. In the report, we describe the various stages of the research process, describe how the research methodology and research objectives evolved throughout the duration of the grant, and present an overview of our research findings. We conclude with discussion of the findings and provide some final recommendations. Our research objectives were as follows:

1. Expand the multi-sectoral network of the partnership to address the barriers that residents face to accessing higher education.
2. Develop diversified learning opportunities for underserved populations by working collaboratively with neighbourhood residents.
3. Advance knowledge of the role of community-based learning hubs in providing individuals from low-income communities with a pathway to education.
4. Build the capacity and aspirations of residents to be self-advocates and independent learners.

5. Provide a high-quality training experience for Mohawk College students through the provision of experiential learning and training opportunities.

## The College and Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF)

The College and Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF) is a funding opportunity delivered under the College and Community Innovation (CCI) Program and managed by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) in collaboration with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). CCSIF grants support social innovation research projects between colleges and their community partners. In bringing together college researchers, students, faculty, and community partners, *The City School Partnership: A Community-Built Response to Improving Access to Education* is directly connected to the central rationale of the CCSIF program to develop “partnerships that foster social innovation in areas such as education, integration of vulnerable populations, and community development” (NSERC, 2019). Drawing upon SSHRC categories, the achieved project outcomes of the research are as follows:

Table 1. CCSIF Project Achievement Outcomes

SSHRC Project Outcomes	City School research-focused description
Enhanced professional practice	The research has informed Mohawk College's access and engagement strategy and has enhanced the College's capacity to engage in social innovation research.
New or enhanced collaborations/partnerships	The research has provided insight on the functioning of the City School Partnership and has strengthened communication and dialogue as new partners are brought on board.
Quality of life/ well-being	The research has deepened the understanding we have of the barriers that students from low-income communities face, and how City School programming enhances the quality of life and well-being of residents.
Training and skills development	The research has facilitated the training and mentoring of Mohawk College students in research methodologies, including research design, data management, and data analysis.
Enhanced policy	The research has contributed to a growing body of evidence regarding the utilization of community hubs in addressing community needs, in addition to informing postsecondary education policies on access and engagement.
Enhanced public discourse	Findings have been communicated to a range of public, policy-oriented, and professional audiences in a variety of forms, and has contributed to a municipal and provincial conversations on issues pertaining to educational access and poverty reduction.



Critical knowledge	The research has contributed knowledge that enhances scholarly discourse and postsecondary policies on access and engagement (see section below detailing the theoretical context and contribution of the research).
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## Theoretical context and contribution of the research

In building upon and extending existing literature and evidence, the research has contributed to the scholarship of postsecondary access and engagement in the following areas:

### *Understanding the connection between poverty and education in Hamilton*

In 2010, the Hamilton Spectator’s Code Red Report places a spotlight on the significant socio-economic disparities that exist between Hamilton neighbourhoods. In particular, the report highlighted the connection between the health and wellness of the City’s low-income residents and such factors as socio-economic status and levels of educational attainment. The project draws and builds upon the available research in exploring issues pertaining to the relationship between socio-economic disparities and a lack of accessible postsecondary educational opportunities in Hamilton (Mayo, 2012; Mayo, Klassen, & Bahkt, 2012; Wingard, 2014). For example, poverty rates for residents living in low-income communities are more than twice as high to the city as a whole and levels of educational attainment are significantly lower than the municipal average (Mayo, 2012). The City School Partnership is a direct institutional response to these disparities and represents a socially innovative solution designed to increase the accessibility of a postsecondary education. In doing so, it complements the City of Hamilton’s Neighbourhood Action Strategy (NAS) (Hamilton, 2017) in helping to build healthier communities.

### *Barriers to postsecondary education*

The research has contributed to the academic scholarship that explores how low-income individuals face a wide range of financial and non-financial barriers regarding the accessibility of a postsecondary education. These barriers include socio-economic status, age, family structure, race and ethnic affiliation, parental education attainment level, and factors related to feelings of social exclusion (Anisef, Brown, & Robson, 2013; Finnie, Mueller, & Wismer 2015; McMullen, 2011; Mueller, 2008; Robson, Anisef, & Brown, 2014). Our findings have deepened the knowledge we have of how these barriers impact the educational pathways of individuals from low-income communities.

## *Low-income adult learners*

The scholarship of adult education presents three sets of factors to explain adult learner participation and engagement with postsecondary: situational (students' life circumstances), institutional (program-related factors), and dispositional/ motivational (students' personal experiences and attitudes) (Cross, 1981; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Philibert, Allen, & Ellevn, 2008; Flynn et al., 2011; Pinsent-Johnson, Howell, & King, 2013; Prins & Schafft, 2009). The research has contributed to this literature by looking specifically at the experiences of low-income adult learners, who continue to remain both underrepresented and underserved in postsecondary education (Frempong, Ma, & Mensah, 2012; Lange et al., 2015; Pollock, 2012).

## *Campus-community engagement*

The research has contributed to a growing body of the literature addressing the range of campus-community access initiatives designed to facilitate the progress of individuals from low-income Canadian communities to postsecondary programs of study (MacKinnon & Silver, 2015; Childs, Hanson, Carnegie-Douglas & Michalski, 2017; Michalski, Cunningham & Henry, 2017). Typically designed to normalize the postsecondary experience, such initiatives aim to demystify the educational process for students, and variously offer credit-based transition courses, financial support, counseling/ advising in educational options, academic upgrading services, the provision of childcare, and integrated wrap-around support. To date, however, Canadian postsecondary institutions have done little to explore the potential of using non-traditional settings (e.g., such as the neighbourhood-based model central to City School) to encourage the participation of under-represented groups in postsecondary education (Anisef, Brown, & Robson, 2013; Stonefish, Craig & O'Neill, 2015).

## **Research alignment with Federal and Provincial policy**

The project aligns with poverty reduction strategies enacted at both the federal and provincial levels. The Canadian federal government has been active in investing in targeted initiatives designed to encourage postsecondary institutions to reach out to previously underrepresented groups through innovative forms of community-based programming (Jones & Field, 2013; Cohen, 2015; Michalski, Cunningham & Henry, 2017). In particular, there is growing interest in the potential of *place-based* initiatives in breaking down the barriers to postsecondary education (MacKinnon & Silver, 2015). In bringing the college classroom to the community, City School represents a socially innovative place-based access strategy designed to challenge barriers to postsecondary for underserved populations.

In Ontario, the provincial government has been active in promoting the localization of the delivery of social services in addressing resident needs through the utilization of community hubs (Pitre, 2014). A community hub is a place-based, one-stop location where individuals from low-income communities can access a broad range of services variously focused on education, health, employment, newcomer settlement, counseling, housing, recreation, and more (Dyson, 2011; Andrews, 2013; Hildebrandt et al., 2017). An important feature of the community hub model (and one central to the design of City School) is the *co-location* or clustering of social services and community facilities in an *anchor facility* (e.g., a community centre, a library, or a school) (Rossiter, 2007). Such locations fulfill a tripartite aim in providing a physical space for resident activities/ events, represent a mechanism that facilitates social service provider integration and collaboration, and fulfill a place-making and community-building opportunity.

Research on postsecondary accessibility typically identifies a range of supports and services as key to promoting greater engagement for underserved populations. Given that community hubs include (to varying degrees depending on their specific focus) a clustering of such supports and services, the co-location of educational-focused programming and resources (as characterizes the City School model) can capitalize upon the programming and services of an existing community hub, and thus help in offsetting the challenges and barriers that underserved groups face.

## **Mohawk College: Creating resilient communities through transformative education**

A foundational premise of any college-community access strategy is the degree of institutional commitment it receives (Calabrese, Goodvin, & Niles, 2005; Riele, 2006; Bowering, Mills, & Merritt, 2017). Mohawk College has long been committed to being an access institution, with City School representing a significant scaling up of its commitment to making a postsecondary education accessible to all. The College's current *Strategic Mandate Agreement 2017-2020* articulates a strong emphasis developing viable and sustainable pathways to education in order to create *resilient communities through transformative education*. The City School Partnership represents a crucial component in achieving this aim, with the current research representing a valuable opportunity to systematically research and study the efficacy of what has been achieved thus far.

Crucial to the success of the partnership has been the dedication and passion of the Community Access and Engagement team at Mohawk College, without whom the current research would not have been possible. Through grassroots community engagement with residents, barriers to education for residents have been identified as including poverty, addiction, family or childcare issues, teen pregnancy, language challenges, and feelings of social exclusion. Furthermore, residents identified a lack of educational readiness as the most significant barrier to their postsecondary participation. This includes a lack of confidence and/or interest in obtaining

a postsecondary education, a lack of awareness of potential programs of study, and a lack of knowledge regarding the application process (Wingard, 2014).

## City School by Mohawk

City School by Mohawk delivers tuition-free, for-credit courses and workshops to low-income residents in Hamilton's low-income neighbourhoods. Participants may take up to two courses, most of which can be later applied to select programs of study in one of the College's postsecondary programs. Applicants must be 19 years or older and not currently enrolled in a postsecondary program of study. Priority is given to individuals with little or no postsecondary experience (i.e., those who may have dropped out of high school, or who may have no academic qualifications beyond a high school education). By bringing the college classroom to the community, City School aims to mitigate some of the institutional barriers that students may have faced in the past regarding the cost and accessibility of a college education, and concerning knowledge of the application process. In addition, students are provided with wraparound support aimed at alleviating some of their situational barriers (courses are tuition-free and, for some courses, childcare is provided), with the ultimate aim of boosting students' confidence and raising their postsecondary aspirations.

## The City School Partnership

The community partners involved in the City School Partnership represent a range of sectors—district school boards, municipal government, and non-profit organizations. The collaborative approach underpinning the partnership accords closely with the *constellation model* of social change as proposed by Surman and Surman (2008), an action-oriented model which brings together multiple sectors in overlapping constellations working to achieve joint outcomes. The partners include:

*Eva Rothwell Centre (ERC)*

*Hamilton Public Library (HPL)*

*St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton*

*City of Hamilton*

*Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC)*

*Mission Services of Hamilton*

*Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB)*

*Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB)*

*Industry Education Council (IEC)*

*Immigrant Working Centre (IWC)*

*Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS)*

*Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF)*

Meeting on a bi-annual basis, representatives of the partners sit on the project steering committee and provide guidance and feedback on the direction of the research. The governance structure of the committee is designed to be flexible and responsive to the specific needs of each neighbourhood. The governance structure also provides a mechanism by which to harmonize the varying mandates of those involved, as well as providing a forum in which to address challenges and roadblocks as they arise.

## Overview of City School course participation and completion rates

The following statistics were collected by the College’s Community Access and Engagement team for internal reporting purposes and were not collected as part of the SSRHC research. They are presented here as contextualization for the subsequent presentation of the qualitative research data. The data distinguishes between registration, enrollment, and unique students, defined as follows:

- **Registration:** A measurement of registered students in a City School course. Registration does not necessarily mean that students have attended class. Used to indicate that Mohawk has accepted the student’s application to attend class.
- **Enrollment:** A measurement taken once a student has attended at least two classes. Used as an indicator of course commitment.
- **Unique Student:** This term indicates individual students. Used to delineate the number of credits earned from the number of students who have earned a credit.

Table 2. Total City School credit courses delivered 2016-2019.

<b>Total credit courses delivered</b>	<b>65</b>
Credit course registration   enrollment   completion rates	
Total registrations	1015
Total enrollments	635
Total credits earned	
Total credits earned	431
Credits earned as a percentage of registration	42%
Credits earned as a percentage of enrollment	68%
Credit courses unique student registration   enrollment   completion rates	
Total unique student registrations	877
Total unique student enrollments	513

Total unique students that have completed a credit course by City School	347
Credits earned by unique students as a percentage of registration	40%
Credits earned by unique students as a percentage of enrollment	68%

A few observations on these statistics:

- 63 per cent of students that have been registered have made it to enrollment.  
Of the 584 students who registered but did not complete their course:
- 65 per cent (380) were no shows or did not make it to enrollment, and
- 35 per cent (204) made it to enrollment but not completion.

Table 3. City School non-credit courses/ workshops delivered 2016-2019.

<b>Total non-credit courses and workshops delivered</b>	<b>21</b>
Course registration   enrollment   completion rates (non-credit courses and workshops)	
Total registration	235
Total enrollments	137
Total completion	115
Total enrollment as a percentage of registration	58%
Total completion as a percentage of registration	49%
Total completion as a percentage of enrollment	84%

A few observations on these statistics:

- 42 per cent of registered students (98) have made it to enrollment
- 16 per cent of enrolled students (22) dropped out between enrollment and completion
- 52 per cent students (120) who have registered have made it to completion

Table 4. City School students enrolled at Mohawk since inception.

Term type	Academic year	Enrollment	Headcount
Apprenticeship	2018-2019	1	1
Apprenticeship total		1	1
Continuing education	2016-2017	17	13
	2017-2018	38	27
	2018-2019	28	24
Continuing education total		83	49
	2016-2017	4	2

Postsecondary (full-time)	2017-2018	31	16
	2018-2019	57	37
Postsecondary total		92	44
<b>Total</b>		<b>176</b>	<b>83*</b>

\* This figure (combining the apprenticeship, continuing education, and postsecondary totals of 1, 49, and 44) includes students enrolled in more than one term during the same academic year.

## Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was used in conducting the research. Research data collection methods focused primarily on the following areas:

- Literature reviews on topics relevant to the research (e.g., low-income students, adult learners, postsecondary access, and campus-community engagement).
- Reviews of postsecondary access and engagement policies in Ontario and Canada.
- Reviews of provincial and federal community-based initiatives focused on education.
- Semi-structured interviews with City School students and faculty, former City School students who have transitioned to a program of study at Mohawk College, and representatives from the diverse range of participants in the City School Partnership.
- Community-based knowledge mobilization: Community-based events were organized in order to share details of the research and provide residents with the opportunity to participate in discussions about the efficacy of City School. Such discussions were conducted in collaboration with members of the College’s Community Access and Engagement team.

## Methodological Orientation

Our methodological orientation is informed by the principles of community-engaged research. These principles emphasize the importance of ongoing and meaningful dialogue and collaboration in the building of a foundation of mutual trust between partners. For example, Anucha, Dlamini, Yan and Smylie (2006) stress the importance of a *community dialogue approach* when working with underserved populations. In this view, community-engagement is understood to be a dialogic, dynamic process that remains responsive to the thoughts and input of all participants (Bourdieu, 1986). Similarly, Bennet and Bennet (2007) characterize this process as one of *collaborative entanglement*; that is, as entailing the “intentional collision and interplay” (p. 19) of the knowledge and perspectives of all those involved. In contrast to the more typical *outreach* focus of traditional modalities of community engagement, the process is characterized

by a focus that allows for the reciprocal *in-reach* of community participants, in a manner designed to be iterative and responsive to the needs of the community (Mosher et al., 2014).

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase of research focused on a sample of courses (see Table 5) delivered through fall 2016 to winter 2017 at two downtown City School classroom locations. This research incorporated and built upon the previously-cited ONCAT-funded study and involved interviewing City School students and faculty from fall 2016 to winter 2018. The two classroom locations include:

- The *Eva Rothwell Centre* (ERC) is situated in the Keith neighbourhood of Hamilton's North End and is the location of the first City School classroom launched in 2015. The ERC provides a wide variety of programs and services for local residents and serves as a community hub for the area.
- The *Hamilton Public Library* (HPL), Central Branch, is situated in the Jamesville neighbourhood and has been the location of the second City School classroom since 2016.

The barriers to education that residents face vary significantly both within and between these two neighbourhoods, as influenced by socio-economic status, demographic differences, immigrant population, and levels of educational attainment. For example, the Keith neighbourhood is a traditionally working-class community, with higher levels of home ownership, and with less ethnic diversity than other priority neighbourhoods (Mayo, Klassen, & Bahkt, 2012, p.22). The Jamesville neighbourhood is part of the downtown core and has been a focal point for a range of municipal-led, youth-centred initiatives, in addition to having a greater number of recently arrive immigrants (Mayo, Klassen, & Bahkt, 2012, p. 17).

The second stage of the research was conducted during winter 2019 and involved interviewing former City School students now enrolled in a program of study at Mohawk College, as well as a representative sample from our community partners. The rationale informing commencing a second stage of data collection was two-fold. First, as City School students have begun to transition to Mohawk College, we realized the necessity of reaching out to them in order to track their progress and gather some preliminary data regarding their perceptions and experiences of the transition process. In this, we are cognizant of the importance of moving beyond a focus on postsecondary *access* to also address students' postsecondary *persistence*. Doing so provided us with an additional vantage point from which to evaluate the efficacy of City School in preparing students for a postsecondary program of study, and to collect data on the barriers and challenges that they continue to face.

Second, we decided to study the multi-sectoral process informing the City School Partnership in order to better understand the communicative and collaborative processes underpinning its functioning, particularly in light of how the partnership continues to evolve and grow. Doing so allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that partners face regarding engaging and serving low-income residents.



## Statement on research ethics

All interviews, contact protocols, and consent forms received ethical clearance before the commencement of the research. Prior to engaging in research, all members of the research team completed the TCPS 2 Tutorial Course on Research Ethics (CORE) available through the SSHRC website. Changes to research instruments and additions to the research design were approved by SSHRC and through research modification requests submitted to the College's Research Ethics Board (REB).

## Methodological considerations

The research raised the following methodological considerations. First, one of our original objectives was to explore developing diversified learning opportunities for at-risk students and vulnerable youth (specifically those aged 15-24). However, after collecting preliminary data on course deliveries, we found that City School students tend to be older (with an average age of 28). As such, our research focus shifted to focus on the barriers and challenges that adult learners face in accessing education. This change in focus was approved by SSHRC and by Mohawk College's Research Ethics Board (REB).

Second, a knowledge gap persists with regard to what we know of non-course completers. This consideration also applies to former City School students who have transitioned to a program of study at the College. In light of this, we are cognizant that those students we did interview typically had a positive experience of the course they had enrolled in, and were thus eager to share their experiences with us. Connecting with students who did not complete a course, or those who had a potentially negative experience, has proven far more challenging. Information (albeit minimal) gleaned from follow-up phone calls with students who failed to complete a course indicates an employment opportunity or childcare or family responsibility as the reason for not continuing in a course.

Third, at the onset of the research we anticipated administering surveys to students in order to gather information regarding their educational/ employment status following course completion. However, these surveys proved of limited utility due to a poor response rate. Although members of the Community Access and Engagement team are able to track students who transition from City School to a program of study at Mohawk College, a lack of data on students (both course completers and non-completers) remains a research gap.

## Interview procedure

A total of 73 semi-structured interviews were conducted with City School students, City School faculty, former City School students who have transitioned to a program of study at Mohawk College, and representatives of our community partners. Interviewees were contacted

by phone and/or email with a request for an interview. Interviews were variously conducted by the research coordinators, lead researcher, and student research assistants (SRAs), and took place at either one of the City School classroom locations, or at Mohawk College. All interview transcripts were analyzed by the research team using a process of thematic analysis, a method used to identify, analyze, and discuss patterns and themes emerging from the data. In essence, thematic analysis is an interpretative process of meaning-making in which key themes and subthemes are identified and categorized (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview samples are as follows:

Table 5. Interview samples

<b>Interview Samples</b>	
City School students (CSS) (interviewed following course completion) (2016-2017)	20
City School faculty (CSF) (interviewed following course completion) (2016-2018)	11
City School students who have transitioned to Mohawk College (CSM) (2019)	11
Representatives from partner organizations (CSP) (including four residents and six representatives of Community Access and Engagement) (2019)	31
<b>Total number of individuals interviewed</b>	<b>73</b>

Our focus on the views and perceptions of City School participants is designed to address what Jones and Lee (2017) see as the absence of resident voice in research on community–campus engagement initiatives, as well as the paucity of studies that specifically address the experiences of underserved adult learners (Flynn et al., 2011).

Quotes from participants interviewed for the research are used extensively in the findings section. In order to preserve anonymity and reduce the risk of identification (as per our ethical commitment to participants), all interviews are assigned a number. Identifiable details have been removed, with minor modifications made to quotations as necessary.

## **Interview participant overview**

### **City School students (CSS)**

Students from a selected sample of courses (detailed below in Table 6) were interviewed during the first phase of research. Interviewed students had completed at least one for-credit course at either one of the downtown City School classroom locations. Interviewed students represented 47.6 per cent of students who completed a course and 27.7 per cent of enrolled students overall. The sample was composed of 15 female students and five male students and ranged in age from 19 to 64 (the average age was in the early 30s). Of the students interviewed, seven had completed two courses (the maximum allowed). More than half of the individuals in

the sample were either first- or second-generation students, with approximately two-thirds having completed high school. Students were drawn from the following course sample:

Table 6. Selected City School Courses Fall 2016-Winter 2017

Course	Enrolled students	Students completed	Graduation rate
Introduction to Health & Wellness (ERC)	9	5	56%
Health Safety & Nutrition (ERC)	17	14	82%
Family Dynamics (ERC)	12	4	33%
Digital Photojournalism (HPL)	20	14	70%
Introduction to Postsecondary Experiences (HPL)	14	5	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>55%</b>

Students were asked a range of questions pertaining to their previous educational experiences, the barriers to education they face, and their experience of taking a course. Research findings provided valuable insight into students’ perspectives on their educational readiness in light of the combination of barriers they face in accessing a postsecondary education, how course design and delivery helped build their academic confidence, and on the efficacy of the community-based classroom model. As mentioned, readers should bear mind that the thematic analysis presented is based on interviews with students who have successfully completed a City School course. A number of the following themes are addressed in more detail in Bourke, Vanderveken, Ecker, Shearer and Atkinson (2019). Interviews with City School students are identified and numbered in findings as CS 1, CS 2, and so on.

### City School faculty (CSF)

A representative sample of 11 instructors who have delivered at least one for-credit course were interviewed during the first phase of the research. Although ethical considerations preclude a more detailed overview of participants, all had some experience of working with underserved populations, with a number having specific expertise in terms of their knowledge of adult learning theory, accessibility, and social justice education. In addition to gaining insight into the initiative's structure and functioning, the rationale for conducting interviews with instructors was to capture the experiential components of teaching a course to residents from disadvantaged backgrounds. Instructors were asked questions on their teaching practice and philosophy, the challenges they encountered when working with low-income adult learners, and how they worked to engage and empower students with course content. Interview data provided valuable information on what areas of course content and delivery they felt students struggled with, and any modifications instructors made to course delivery as a result. Faculty views on the

strengths and limitations of the community-based model were also explored. Interviews with City School faculty are identified and numbered in findings as CSF 1, CSF 2, and so on.

### City School to Mohawk College students (CSM)

A sample of 11 former City School students currently enrolled in various programs of study at Mohawk College were interviewed as part of the second phase of the project. Students were asked questions pertaining to their transition experience and how well taking a City School course prepared them for a fuller program of study. Students were also asked questions regarding the barriers and challenges they continued to face, as well as what their recommendations were for how to improve the City School and college transition experience. Interviews with City School students who have transitioned to Mohawk are identified and numbered in findings as CSM 1, CSM 2, and so on.

### City School partners (CSP)

Interviews were conducted with individuals representing the diverse range of sectors involved in the City School partnership, including a selection of those from education, municipal government, non-profit organizations, and resident groups. Interviewing such individuals allowed us to broaden the dialogue with regard to the understanding we have of the challenges that residents face in accessing a postsecondary education, and of the benefits of the neighbourhood model informing City School. Doing so aligns with our research objective of enhancing the knowledge we have of the barriers associated with transitioning to postsecondary education at the community level. Participants were asked questions pertaining to their role and participation in City School, how they felt the initiative has been received by the individuals and groups they work with, and how their institution/ organization has been influenced by such participation. Participants also offered insight on the efficacy of the neighbourhood-based hub model. Interviews with City School Partners are identified and numbered in findings as CSP 1, CSP 2, and so on.

## Findings

This section details the findings of each interview cohort in turn. Findings are presented with a brief précis of the key themes that emerged from the interview data.

### City School student interviews

#### *Barriers to postsecondary*

Interviews with students indicate that the barriers to education that they face are complex and varied. Commonly cited situational barriers include financial precarity, family responsibilities and commitments and/or a lack of family support, and employment; institutional barriers include the cost and accessibility of a postsecondary education, and knowledge of how to apply; and dispositional/ motivation barriers include a lack of confidence and low levels of self-esteem. In addition, a wide range of individual barriers variously pertaining to immigrant status, age, disability, mental health, and English as a second language (ESL) status compound these barriers. In other words, no two City School students are alike regarding their life circumstances, and in terms of how the barriers they experience intersect and compound each other. Despite this broad range of experience, a unifying factor was that the majority of students are low-income adult learners from low-income neighbourhoods. One student described the impact of the financial precarity that this entails on their postsecondary aspirations as follows:

Trying to go back to school when you don't have the money to go to school is a major hindrance, and it's a concern, and it's stressful, and the stress holds you back when you're trying to concentrate on your learning and yet you don't feel that you're in a comfortable position in your life to learn (CSS Interview 1).

Drawing upon the research, a more detailed analysis of how students' individual barriers intersect with, and are compounded by, structural barriers (such as a lack of childcare and employment opportunities) can be found in Bourke, Vanderveken, Ecker, Shearer and Atkinson (2019).

#### *Reasons for enrolling in City School*

Participants cited a range of reasons for enrolling in a City School course. All students interviewed described the course as an opportunity to pursue a pathway to postsecondary education. A number of students described their decision to enrol in a course as an opportunity to

improve their job-readiness, often due to not having a job or after having had a succession of low-paying jobs with limited prospects of job satisfaction or enjoyment. Commenting on the reasons herself and her classmates enrolled in a course, the following student remarked:

Some I know were just here just to see what it's about, like the social aspect of it. But most were (here) with the intention of... will this help with getting me a better job or going back to school? (CSS Interview 3).

Most of those interviewed, however, described the course as an opportunity to get back to what participants referenced as the right mindset for postsecondary study. With the majority of students being adult learners, many have been out of school for some time, whereas others have had a previous negative postsecondary experience and are thus wary, if not distrustful, of the postsecondary system. For such students, City School provided a low-risk opportunity to get a taste of college. Students with postsecondary aspirations were particularly appreciative of the credit incentive. As the following student remarked:

I really enjoyed that while its tuition free, it's actually a college credit. So, for somebody who is, you know, maybe exploring postsecondary options and they haven't really had any other postsecondary education, they would have a credit in the bag when they finally picked their program... (CSS Interview 11).

### *Building student confidence*

Participants varied widely in terms of the extent to which the barriers and/or challenges they faced affected their level of educational readiness. While some students did describe themselves as lacking confidence in their academic abilities, others mentioned feeling despondent due to a lack of direction or having difficulty identifying a potential educational pathway. As one student commented:

I think the common link between myself and the others in my class is that many people are feeling that they need a... kind of a jump-start if you will [...] A lot of us probably felt like we needed that confidence boost (CSS Interview 1).

It is important to note that a lack of confidence in their academic abilities does not necessarily mean that students lacked academic ability, but rather that they faced challenging dispositional/motivational barriers that impacted their level of educational readiness. For the majority of students, taking a course was the catalyst they needed to encourage them to consider pursuing a future course of postsecondary study.

## *The City School learning environment*

For many students, time spent away from formal education and/or a previous negative experience of education resulted in a lack of confidence and poor self-conceptualizations of themselves as students. All interviewees testified to the confidence-boosting effects of City School. A variety of factors were crucial to achieving this, including, but not limited to; small class size, the convenience of the neighbourhood-based location, instructors sensitized to their learning needs, flexibility with regard to assignments and course completion components, and the sense of community that developed as a result of the shared classroom experience. As such, it is important to note that the confidence-boosting effects of course participation is the result of a carefully constructed and managed learning environment. The following quote is indicative of the cumulative effect of the support provided to students:

I get excited and I have support in my life. I had a dream to do this and I wanted to take it. And I'm finally taking the step that I want to do. There's a lot of good things out of this now. I have a lot of support from Mohawk and from the City School people. I've got a lot of support (CSS Interview 4).

In addition, key to achieving this dispositional/ motivational shift is the provision of wraparound support (e.g. childcare services, and the alleviation of worries regarding transportation and travelling to the College campus) that helped facilitate greater course engagement among students.

## *Course design and delivery*

Students provided positive feedback on course delivery, although their views differed regarding their assessment of the level of difficulty (although it should be noted that this is also due to the range of courses delivered). Although some suggested that the course appeared (in their view) simplified, several described their course experience as challenging yet manageable. Generally, students found the pacing of the course (as facilitated by their instructors) to be conducive to their learning needs, in addition to being appreciative of the flexibility accorded to them by their instructors regarding assignment submissions and deadlines. Several students spoke of the beneficial effects of being provided with assignments that required them to apply course content to their personal lives. As one student noted:

We had to do a profile there on ourselves and I think that was the hardest thing for everybody [...] because you had to really - I mean it was good because it put you in the

position to really think about yourself, your needs, your wants, your whatever for down the road. But I think that's what woke most of us up (CSS Interview 3).

A course component that students particularly enthused on was the job-shadowing feature (in courses that included such a component), with several students commenting at length on how beneficial they found the inclusion of this employer connection and networking opportunity. As one student remarked; "I just hope this program (component) continues to run. It was such a great opportunity to really get an idea of what Hamilton Health Sciences is all about". (CSS Interview 11).

The only pronounced point of critique that emerged from interviews was regarding the condensed nature of course delivery, with several students commenting on the brevity of its duration (this theme is also addressed below in the section below detailing the findings from the partner interviews).

### *Course instructors*

There was a consensus among students across interviews that instructors were key to helping them succeed in the course, with interviewees regularly commenting on how instructors variously provided them with encouragement, counselling, guidance, and advice. Students commented on how instructors provided them with plentiful one-on-one time, often made themselves accessible during and after class, and were sensitized to their learning needs. Commenting on the support and guidance she received from her instructor in completing her first assignment, the following student commented:

I decided to do it [enroll] and I was scared to death [but] after the first assignment... that was it. I wasn't nervous anymore or anything... that was pretty much it then. After that, it was, like, well... I can do this! (CSS Interview 3).

Coupled with the additional wraparound support provided by the College, the skill and care with which instructors engaged with their students is of crucial importance in promoting student engagement with course material and content.

### *Students' appetite for learning*

Students identified a range of ways in which they felt they had benefitted from enrolling in a City School course. Beyond the previously identified benefits (e.g., confidence boost, credit incentive, reducing barriers to postsecondary, and so on), several interviewees commented on the interest they had in the course subject matter and how they were able to apply what they learned



in their course to their lives and community. For example, a number of students who had taken family or health-themed courses commented on the applicability of what they had learned in the classroom to their personal lives, in terms of improving their home/ childcare skills. As the following student noted:

In general, I think it's more information and, you know, even to help me with my kids, right, because like, you know, safety, nutrition, everything will help, so yeah... I like to be more educated about stuff you can use every day. Even at home or at work it's very important to know this information (CSS Interview 9).

Related to this, several interviewees commented on how they hoped their course participation would allow them to set an example for their children. Such comments provide a very preliminary indication of the anticipated ripple-effects of City School; that is, as an initiative that seeks to affect a shift in intergenerational cycles of poverty (this was also a pronounced theme in interviews with partners, as detailed in the relevant section below).

### *Neighbourhood-based classroom location*

Students spoke favourably of how the neighbourhood-based location helped them concentrate more fully on engaging with course content, in addition to how this mitigated concerns regarding the cost of transportation and/or issues regarding childcare (in the case of courses where such a service was provided). The convenience and familiarity of the classroom location was also strengthened by its location within pre-existing community focal points. For example, students taking a course in the central library could also access the additional services provided by the library (e.g., access to computers, printing facilities, and meeting spaces). This highlights the importance of building upon existing neighbourhood-based services and facilities, and of the value of the community hub model as a gathering place for resident activities (Haig, 2014, p. 1024). The following student commented on the benefits of the neighbourhood-based location in the following terms:

I have spoken to so many people, and they were highly impressed with what we learned and the time that they [faculty] gave us. This place is very easy to come to. It's not far away. You don't have to travel much. If you are downtown, this is the best place you can come (CSS Interview 15).

## City School faculty interviews

### *Empowering students*

Instructors observed that many students did not have a solid understanding of what college/postsecondary attendance and participation looks like and saw their role as partly being to provide them with as realistic a picture of the college experience as possible. The task of empowering students on their educational journey, and of facilitating the process of self-discovery, was of central importance for all instructors. Self-discovery refers to helping students identify their tacit knowledge, talents, passions, and strengths, whereas empowerment refers to equipping them with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to apply those passions and strengths in a way that supports their academic goals, including both successful engagement with the course and potentially pursuing a further postsecondary pathway. Instructors noted how students were able to apply what they learned in the classroom to their home and family lives, and noted how reflective assignments were beneficial in achieving this. The following instructor commented on how guiding students in completing assignment was key to empowering them:

I just love having the students that come to you and they're so nervous and for some of them it's their first time doing postsecondary... which is huge. So I love seeing them for the first class and then by the end the confidence and the fact that they have gotten good grades on the tests and assignments and they can... they actually think 'I can do this'... I love seeing that transition (CSF Interview 3).

Cognizant of how students from low-income backgrounds are often viewed as lacking confidence necessary for achieving success in postsecondary study, instructors stressed the importance of putting aside any preconceptions educators may hold regarding their abilities. While instructors were mindful of how the barriers that students faced impacted their learning, they stressed the importance of not conflating a lack of confidence with a lack of academic ability.

### *Course design challenges*

Instructors spoke of the challenge of developing a curriculum that would engage as well as challenge students. In terms of fostering engagement, instructors commented on the value and necessity of implementing a community-driven curriculum, in terms of developing course content and assignments that students can relate their experiences to. In addition, focusing on topics and themes of interest and relevance to the community also helped connect students with course content. Commenting on the challenge of striking a balance between providing students with engaging course content and suitable level of difficulty, one instructor noted:

... That was one of the trickiest things from me because the spectrum of students that I had was so diverse [...] so how do you offer a curriculum that's challenging as well as not threatening or defeating for the whole class? (CSF Interview 4).

Mindful of this, instructors made adaptations to their regular teaching pedagogies in terms of the pacing of course content delivery and expectations regarding the submission of assignments (e.g., providing students with some flexibility regarding the deadlines and format requirements).

### *Faculty-student connections*

Instructors were mindful of how the variety of learner needs present in the classroom required what one instructor referred to as the ability to wear “different hats” (CSF Interview 2) in the classroom, as they switched between the role of teacher to mentor to counselor. Instructors also commented on how students required more in the way of individual attention from them, and how they found that students were eager to build a rapport with them. Small class sizes were seen as crucial to building such a rapport, particularly with regard to fostering a sense of collegiality and community within the classroom. Commenting on the necessity of maintaining a flexible approach to the learning environment, the following instructor noted:

My own personal philosophy is to support all the students in any respect that I can, offering them services that I have the expertise in and referring them onto services that I do not have the expertise in. I truly do believe in engaging students in all aspects... I'm part of the learning process as well with them, so we're kind of learning together (CSF Interview 7).

Comparing teaching in City School versus a regular Mohawk College course, the following instructor described the student-faculty dynamic in the classroom as follows:

You know, you have your dedicated students (at Mohawk) that attend class on a regular basis, and you have the students that won't come to class. Whereas at City School, they're there. They're waiting for the instructor to arrive. You know they're looking forward to having that interaction with the instructor (CSF Interview 7).

### *Preparing students for postsecondary*

Instructors observed that many students did not have a solid understanding of what college/postsecondary attendance and participation looks like and saw their role as partly involving providing them with as realistic a picture of the college experience as possible. Recognizing the anxieties and apprehensions students had, and working to alleviate them, was

crucial to how the course progressed early on. When asked about how they gauge success in teaching their courses, the most common observations among the instructors centered around high levels of student engagement and participation within their classes, as well as increased student interest and confidence in potentially pursuing a further program of postsecondary study. One instructor described the *raison d'être* of City School in the following terms:

I think the goal of City School... is to make informed choices, (to) find out what college life is actually like, to prepare yourself... prepare yourself for success so that you can have the right supports and attitude and skills in place to succeed (CSF Interview 8).

Encouraging students to make informed choices, however, also necessitates acknowledging that not all students will pass the course or have a positive experience. In light of this, the instructor quoted above suggested caution be exercised regarding both student and program expectations:

I think there is a little bit too much of an emphasis on the need that everyone has to succeed [...] (to) pass the class, (that) everyone should finish, everyone should have a positive experience. But you know what, not everybody finishes and not everyone has a positive experience, and that's okay (CSF Interview 8).

### *Neighbourhood-based course delivery*

Instructors spoke positively of how the community-based college classroom in the community model provided students with a convenient, non-threatening learning environment that lacked the intimidation factor of the main College campus (in addition to addressing some of their situational barriers regarding childcare and transportation). As one instructor noted:

I think it's really important that it's in their community (...) The students that I had lived in that community and it was their space in their community, and I think that it was in a space that they knew. It was in a space that they were comfortable with (CSF Interview 6).

Instructors also noted the importance of providing students with community-based wrap-around support, with the presence and/ or absence of such support being a key factor shaping students' ability to engage with the course and in encouraging them to pursue a further course of postsecondary study. According to the following instructor, community outreach and engagement at the grassroots level is key to developing a community-engaged pedagogical sensibility that works to engage students:

I think it shows Mohawk's commitment to the community. I think that outreach is key. I love that it's free because you really are setting people up for productive failure because the stakes are low. Like, emotionally the stakes might be a little bit higher, but you're giving them the ability to learn safely and without incurring too much further loss (CSF Interview 8).

The only criticism that emerged of the model was with regard to the open configuration of the City School classroom location at the HPL, with a number of instructors commenting on the lack of privacy and intrusion of noise pollution from adjacent areas of the library.

### *Providing support to students*

Instructors noted the importance of ensuring that City School students be provided with support when seeking to pursue a further course of study and/or employment pathway (a theme which also featured throughout the interviews with partners and former City School students now attending Mohawk). For students holding postsecondary aspirations, instructors suggested that they require ongoing assistance in choosing a program of study and in navigating the application process. In particular, there is a need to smooth the transition process between City School and Mohawk College. In working to demystify the postsecondary experience for students, instructors acknowledged the importance of maintaining a connection with the main College campus through classroom visits from college representatives and campus visits. Commenting on the importance of arranging a campus visit, one instructor noted:

It's really important for them to be up here, to understand that the campus isn't as scary as it looks and [...] familiarizing themselves with it is really important, as well as learning our learning management system [...] I guess my perspective is checking off as many boxes as I can... teaching them about college before they actually get here so they're not intimidated (CSF Interview 4).

## **City School to Mohawk College student interviews**

### *City School as an introduction to postsecondary*

All students were asked to reflect and comment upon their City School experience in light of their status as students currently enrolled in a program of study at the College. Students commented on how taking a City School course (or two) had provided them with a safe, convenient, and low-risk opportunity to get a taste of the postsecondary experience. Central to

this positive experience were the design and structure of the program (e.g. tuition-free, small class size, increased flexibility regarding assessments, additional support, and the neighbourhood-based setting). Several students commented on how successfully completing a course boosted their motivation to pursue an educational opportunity. As the following student noted:

Mohawk should be really proud of coming up with that option for people because... It's very difficult to make the decision to go back so many years after being out of school. So, the thought of no pressure, no stress... you go and you're not paying back a loan at the end of the day. It's a good feeling and sometimes that might be what changes a person's mind about what they do with themselves later (CSM Interview 1).

In particular, the appreciation and gratitude students felt towards their instructors cannot be overstated. The same student as quoted above continued to remark:

[The instructor] helped guide me through the OSAP application, how to apply, what paperwork I would need and that... she helped me a whole heck of a lot. There was no way she was letting me get away with not going. She really wanted me enrolled and so yeah, she was on top of that stuff (CSM Interview 1).

Although some students acknowledged that City School classes are more relaxed and conducted in a more informal manner than regular Mohawk College classes, others suggested that City School courses could benefit from a greater structure and by implementing a more demanding assessment/ evaluation process. Notwithstanding these seemingly contradictory views, students spoke positively of the extent to which taking a City School course prepared them for embarking a postsecondary pathway at the College.

### *Students' shifting perceptions of postsecondary*

Students commented on how City School proved effective at encouraging them to develop positive study habits, test out a field of potential study, and generally get a taste of college life and routine. As one student noted:

It did prepare me with getting used to, like, the study habits and, like, the routines and like assignments and due dates and stuff like that, with deadlines, getting better at deadlines, all that kind of stuff (CSM Interview 3).

The prevailing view among respondents (bearing in mind that all those interviewed were successful course completers) was that City School adequately prepared students for what one respondent referred to as Mohawk's "whole environment for learning" (CSM Interview 3). In doing so, it helped shift their perceptions of what is involved in postsecondary study. The City School experience helped to remove a lot of the intimidation factor that a postsecondary program

of study can entail, and allowed students to “step out of my comfort zone” (CSM Interview 6) and “preview a little bit what a program (of study) would be like” (CSM Interview 3). In particular, students were appreciative of how City School demystified the postsecondary process by breaking it down step-by-step. As the following student noted:

It opened my eyes to opportunities. I was not aware of all the opportunities that were available for me prior to taking City School. So now, I’m seeing everything from a different perspective, and when you have different perspective that really does change everything (CSM Interview 9).

### *Transitioning to Mohawk College*

Commenting on the differences between taking a City School course and their course experience at Mohawk College, students commented that City School courses kept them more engaged. Reasons for this included the smaller class size typical of City School and closer, more personal contact with faculty. Students commented on how the larger class sizes at the College presented them with a more challenging learning environment. A number of students commented on the ongoing connection and assistance they continued to receive from either their former City School instructor or Community Access and Engagement staff. As one student commented “I still have that connection where, you know, if I’m having trouble, I can go to them and they’ll help me out. So, it’s been a really, really big part of my college experience” (CSM Interview 1). Although several students did avail of campus resources and supports (e.g., attending day-one orientation activities, the learning support centre etc.), some suggested that the College could do more regarding reaching out to former City School students, particularly those who continued to experience barriers and challenges. A number of students suggests that a designated "go-to" area for former City School students should they need support would be beneficial.

### *Course-credit transfer challenges*

A transition issue that arose (a theme also raised in partner interviews) in a number of interviews was that of ensuring that the program of study students had entered recognized their City School credit. Students commented on the overly bureaucratic and time-consuming administrative process that figuring this out involved. While it is apparent that the credit is an incentive for students to try City School, it is unclear whether these credits are useful when transferring into a program of study. As the following two students noted:

It’s a matter of easing the transition from your one class City School to an actual program just in terms of, you know, like helping with navigating, getting your credit put on your transcript and getting help applying and just ease the transition financially. Just keep doing what they’re doing, but better (CSM Interview 8).

If there can be a more automated way to transfer the credit over without having to kind of smack some people up the head, that would be nice (CSM Interview 11).

### *Persistent barriers and challenges*

Students continued to experience a range of situational, individual, and institutional challenges while enrolled at Mohawk (although the nature of how these barriers combined varied considerably between students). The primary situational barrier student faced remained financial. Beyond the cost of postsecondary (e.g., fees, cost of textbooks etc.), students also commented on concerns regarding navigating the payment of fees and the OSAP application and waiting period. Several students expressed frustrations regarding the cost and extent of the usage of textbooks. This would appear to be particularly burdensome for students who struggle financially, with resentment resulting from this also potentially creating a dispositional barrier towards the postsecondary experience.

Students commented upon ongoing individual challenges as pertaining to such issues as age, disability, and mental health. That said, students spoke positively of the degree of support available to them through ongoing connections with the Community Access and Engagement office, as well as through the supports and services provided by the College (e.g., Accessible Learning Services, the Square, and the Learning Support Centre). A number of students suggested that maintaining an ongoing peer support mentoring connection with former City School students would be beneficial to helping them succeed.

Finally, students were enthusiastic in the advice they offered to future potential City School and/or Mohawk College students, variously recommending that they stick with and enjoy the course experience, engage with course content and complete assignments, and avail of the opportunity to pursue their ambitions. One student described the importance of City School as follows:

City School offers a way to get into college and makes it accessible, so I would tell them to pay attention to when they're telling you about supports and when they're telling you about services and things like that because it will make your life a lot easier...I really think it's an important place because it's such an important program and I'm really glad that Hamilton has it because it allows people to consider that they might be able to go to college (CSM Interview 4).

### *Promoting awareness of City School in the community*

Views regarding the extent to which City School has a presence in the community were mixed among interviewees. A theme raised in four out of 11 interviews was the perceived need to more widely advertise City School at the community level (this issue was also raised in



several of the partner interviews). A number of students suggested that community-level awareness of City School appears to be low. As one student noted:

I feel like maybe it's not as out there as they would hope because even now when I mention to people, they ask why'd you start college, I tell them about City School and they're like... what is that? (CSM Interview 1).

Although several students commented on how they became aware of City School through social media (e.g. Facebook), a number of interviewees suggested that maintaining people/ familiar faces (i.e., Community Access staff) in the community is key to connecting with individuals likely to avail of City School opportunities, particularly in light of the ability of such staff to respond directly to questions individuals may have (for example, regarding the tuition-free and for-credit components). Although social media/ flyers/ posters have certainly caught the attention of residents, having informed people (e.g., Community Access and Engagement staff/ social service workers placement students) to talk about/advertise City School is the best way to increase community awareness.

## **City School partner interviews**

### *City School as a response to poverty in Hamilton*

The overriding impression gleaned from interviews with partners is two-fold: First, City-School is now part of a citywide conversation on educational access and poverty reduction in the City of Hamilton. To this end, all partners expressed appreciation for the consultative and reciprocal decision-making process that has informed its programming from the beginning. A one community partner noted “It’s all hard work, you know. It’s long, hard work” (CSP Interview 14). In developing a resident-driven and customized response to community need, respondents spoke positively to how the College has gained the trust of residents and buy-in from the community. As the above-cited respondent also noted:

It (the College) has been very deliberate step-wise, I think, and thoughtful all the way along in engaging the citizens in the areas where they are... I think it really does meet their needs because they've taken the time, Mohawk has taken the time to listen to what people have to say about what their needs are and what the barriers are (CSP Interview 14).

In other words, partners consider the grassroots outreach that the College has done in seeking to understand the needs of residents to be indicative of a commitment to the community not solely rooted in attempts to recruit fee-paying students.

Second, and notwithstanding the promising early-days success of City School in its first three years, it remains a “cog in a much bigger wheel” (CSP Interview 19) of municipal/ provincial intervention, one that cannot be considered in isolation from the multi-sectoral

services provided by partner organizations in concert with broader poverty-reduction strategies. Such considerations are important to keep in mind as City School continues to gain traction in low-income neighbourhoods. Several partners acknowledged there to be hard-to-reach demographics in the city for whom pursuing a postsecondary pathway is not currently a viable option. As such, partners recognize that gaps remain that additional partnering can work to address.

### *Benefits to partner mandates*

Participants commented positively on how City School facilitated a process of mutual growth with regard to their various institutional/ organizational mandates. Beyond demonstrating how City School strengthens Mohawk's commitment to increasing access to postsecondary for underserved populations, the feedback received from community/ municipal partners indicated that City School allowed partners to "piggy-back" on each other's resources and capacities. This is particularly beneficial for community-based agencies with limited resources and capacity. For example, one participant (CSP Interview 8) remarked how the introduction of City School programming helped free them up to either provide additional contact hours with clients, or to provide other activities that helped them fulfil their organizational mandate. A consultative and ongoing dialogue has been central to achieving such mutual growth. Illustrating this, another respondent commented: "What I particularly like is that they (Mohawk College) partner with us, they consult with us and they're responsive to what we talk about... I don't think they've changed us as much as they've helped us grow" (CSP Interview 14).

In addition to how the Partnership promotes interest and connection in the community for Mohawk College (and hence potentially benefitting recruitment), the following two partners commented on the benefits of their increased visibility:

(The) partnership has enriched our organization only because the partnership has enabled us to fulfil our mission statement and our mandate in the community. Being able to partner with a bigger organization like City School at Mohawk, they have allowed us to become more visible, to do our work more effectively and efficiently and has allowed us to have a broader reach than we would otherwise have (CSP Interview 1).

It's hard to think of the [community-based initiative] and the work that we do and not think of City School as, you know, they're not twins, but they're like family and we move together (CSP Interview 3).

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which City School has been received by partners, the complex nature of the barriers that residents face increases the need for City School to encourage the breakdown of social service silos in fostering a collaborative social support network.

## *Partner referral opportunities*

Several interviewees spoke to what one respondent described as the “unique referral opportunity” (CSP Interview 2) that the City School model makes possible, with this being a benefit of the co-location hub strategy. Although community-based service providers can refer or recommend City School to their client populations, City School representatives (staff and faculty) can also inform students of the services available at the City School location. Partners acknowledged that it is important that service providers (e.g., front-line staff) have knowledge of the City School programming (e.g., courses and workshops) available, but also that City School personnel (faculty and staff) have information of the diverse services that those and other connected organizations provide. Of central importance to the efficacy of this mutual referral process is the need (where necessary) to strengthen information and communication at both ends (although the sense from interviews is that communication is good).

## *Programmatic flexibility*

A benefit of the City School model as highlighted by partners is its intrinsic programmatic flexibility, particularly with regard to how this can help reach underserved populations. Comparing the rigidity of regular postsecondary programming with City School, one participant commented:

City School is a little more open, City School is a little more flexible with things, so they can do things like “Oh we’ll get a grant and we’ll try to do new programming” or “We’ll, you know, try to reach this audience that hasn’t been reached by the current system.” I would say City School’s perception is that it’s more open and it’s more flexible than most other areas in postsecondary or at Mohawk (CSP Interview 4).

The flexibility of City School functioning was perceived by respondents as beneficial in terms of allowing programming to remain responsive to the community and employer needs and input. As one interviewee remarked: “our purpose does not change, but our methods evolve” (CSP Interview 5).

The main point of concern expressed regarding City School programming (a theme also raised during faculty interviews), is the extent to which the City School experience replicates a “real” postsecondary experience. Granted, City School courses are tailored to meet the needs of vulnerable populations, resulting in smaller class sizes and flexible deadlines for assignments, and so on. However, it is important to ensure that the experience adequately prepares participants for the full postsecondary experience. On this note, partners had various recommendations regarding the implementation of a mentoring and/or follow-up support system (incorporated

below in the recommendations section). As noted in the previous section, such recommendations were also echoed by former City School students.

### *City School 'ripple effects'*

A number of respondents commented on how the impact of City School was effecting an attitudinal shift in participants regarding the benefits of a postsecondary education. In particular, interviewees expressed optimism regarding what they saw as very preliminary steps being made to break down intergenerational cycles of poverty for City School participants. Commenting on the 'rippling effect' of City School, one respondent suggested that City School is "breaking down those barriers... where people never, ever thought they could come to postsecondary... the barriers where everyone in their family, nobody ever went to postsecondary. It was never part of their DNA" (CSP Interview 11). As expressed by a partner:

The ripple effect for me is, the minute you change and provide the educational component to a student that changes their life. In turn, as they get older and will have now have more self-esteem, more knowledge, more education, so that they can pass that on to their kids, or their friends, or their colleagues (CSP Interview 9).

### *City School as a stepping-stone to opportunities*

Partners offered their perceptions of the efficacy of City School in boosting the educational readiness of students. In terms of how City School benefitted students, a number of respondents commented on how it variously boosted the confidence, self-esteem, or feelings of personal self-worth of participants. Commenting on the stepping-stone connection to educational opportunities that City School provides, one respondent noted: "The benefits are immense. It gives people confidence that they can do it. It shows people that this could be a possibility for them. It builds hope (...) I think it inspires them" (CSP Interview 11). Key to achieving this attitudinal shift among City School students is the instructor delivering the course. Throughout the interview transcripts, respondents commended the dedication exhibited by instructors in providing students with encouragement, advice, counsel, and guidance. For students, instructors represent the face of City School and, hence, of Mohawk College. As one respondent noted:

I've seen the teachers. They love their students... I often get tears when I see them that final class. I've not seen so much dedication to a certain group of students, so they're doing a fantastic job and it's been a very rewarding process (CSP Interview 10).

## *Benefits of the community hub model*

All respondents commented on the benefits of the community-based delivery model. In providing a taste of the postsecondary experience in a non-traditional learning environment that lacks the intimidation factor of the main college, participation in City School was perceived of as being a low-risk opportunity for individuals to “preview” or “test” the postsecondary experience. In addition to helping demystify the postsecondary experience, the community-based classroom also operated as a safe and empowering space for individuals experiencing barriers to their learning (e.g. mental health). As the following partner noted:

I think the philosophy of having classrooms in peoples’ community hubs is a natural one (...) I know that most importantly we bring services to them, we don’t ask them to go to the services. People want one-stop sort of shops. They want to go to a place and access one service and be able to access and meet a couple of their other needs in that same building, and that is a natural philosophy to me and it works really well (CSP Interview 5).

Notwithstanding the benefits of the model, it was also acknowledged that City School plays a role as a cog in a larger process of intervention made possible by the hub model. The following respondent described the hub model as being like a wheel with many spokes: “They (participants) cannot get stuck in the hub. The whole point is the spoke, and I think sometimes people forget that the hub has a spoke that leads elsewhere” (CSP Interview 7).

Respondents also commended City School as being responsive to labour market demands in the community. Commenting on how City School “have their finger on the pulse of what’s going on in our local labour market”, the following respondent commented:

I think that it has so much value in terms of the way it interfaces with the employers, it interfaces with the community itself and brings them all together to sort of think about labour market solutions (...) I think there’s always limitations around these things, and it’s staying ahead of the curve, right? (CSP Interview 14).

## *Concerns regarding the sustainability of the partnership*

Several participants expressed concerns regarding the current provincial funding climate and how this could potentially limit the programming and services that community-based agencies are able to offer. One respondent suggested this to be a driving force towards greater collaboration: “that’s when we need to work together because, you know, we’re all facing challenges” (CSP Interview 8). The shrinking and precarious funding climate was cited by a number of respondents as introducing a degree of uncertainty to the programming and services

partners are able to offer. Although the College was perceived by one respondent as being relatively “well-resourced” (CSP Interview 14), another interviewee expressed concern regarding the sustainability of the College’s budgetary commitment to City School: “My thought is (that) even if it isn't cost effective, it's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do. We should be doing this. It's ethically, morally, the right thing to do” (CSP Interview 15). Such views are compelling in strengthening the moral case for continual investment in City School.

## Discussion

The discussion below draws upon the interview findings in addressing the research project objectives listed at the beginning of this report. Following this is a list of final recommendations and action items.

*Research objective 1: Expand the multi-sectoral network of the partnership to address the barriers that residents face to accessing higher education.*

The Hamilton Spectator recently published an update on its original Code Red report (Buist, 2019). The update describes how little progress has been made over the past 10 years in combating embedded poverty and the associated poor health outcomes that characterize the City's Code Red neighbourhoods. As detailed in the report, "When it comes to income, poverty, and education, there has been almost no movement in reducing the gaps between the best-performing and worst-performing neighbourhoods over the past decade" (Buist, 2019). In light of this finding, working to ensure that residents from low-income communities have access to viable pathways to a postsecondary education remains a necessity. As illustrated in the findings, City School may help raise students’ postsecondary aspirations, yet it has limited capacity to address the full range of barriers and challenges they face. Although residents act as purposeful agents in constructing their educational pathways, our findings suggest that the decisions residents make cannot be considered in isolation from the economic and structural conditions impacting their communities. In acknowledging this, we remain cognizant of how programmatic responses working to promote greater postsecondary access and engagement cannot solve entrenched poverty in isolation from multi-sectoral poverty reduction strategies enacted at the municipal and provincial levels.

It is also important to recognize that focusing predominantly on individual and programmatic factors can obscure how socio-structural and community contexts can decisively influence the degree of engagement of low-income residents. The result is a downplaying of how the decisions and actions that residents take regarding their educational participation is shaped by such factors as a lack of accessible education, a dearth of well-paying jobs, a lack of child-care, and the experience of socio-economic exclusion (Mueller, 2008; Abada, Hou, & Rams, 2009;

Prins & Schafft, 2009; McMullen, 2011). In other words, continuing to collaborate with our community partners in addressing the complex interplay of individual and structural barriers that residents face remains an absolute imperative for the success and forward momentum of City School. The findings of our research are clear in supporting the view that achieving collective impact necessitates collectively coordinated action.

*Research objective 2: Develop diversified learning opportunities for underserved populations by working collaboratively with neighbourhood residents.*

Feedback received from interview participants supports the view that the College has built City School in a manner that is respectful and responsive to resident needs. The authenticity of this engagement has been crucial to avoiding what Keating and Sioquist (2000, p. 46) term the “hit-and-run syndrome” that often typifies how postsecondary institutions (particularly universities) have engaged with communities. Although this has resulted in an increase in the level of trust and communication between the College and the community, a recurring theme across the interviews that City School still requires time and buy-in from the community. Granted, such perceptions are necessarily contextualized by the relative infancy of the program, particularly in light of the long-term aim of disrupting intergenerational cycles of poverty. Although the appetite among partners to continue being “active participants in the dialogue” (CSP Interview 8) remains strong, it is important to remain cognizant of how maintaining a relationship of trust with neighbourhood residents is an ongoing process.

Collaborating with community partners in developing and expanding the learning opportunities available to underserved populations also involves acknowledging the heterogeneity of such populations. Recognizing the social, cultural, and demographic diversity of those that live in the city’s priority neighbourhoods (Hamilton Community Foundation, 2015) is a crucial consideration when seeking to expand the multi-sectoral reach and scope of the City School Partnership. It is not just a question of exploring what works best in terms of engaging hard-to-reach populations, but also of what works *for whom* and under *which circumstances* (Zygnier, 2011, p. 213, authors’ emphasis), particularly in light of the complex interplay of the situational, motivational, and individual barriers that residents face. Such considerations caution us to remain mindful of the demographic specificity of targeted populations. Furthermore, and as addressed in the recommendations section, whether residents are seeking pathways to education or employment has implications for the expansion of City School programming.

*Research objective 3: Advance knowledge of the role of community-based learning hubs in providing individuals from low-income communities with a pathway to education.*

Central to the success of City School is the college classroom in the community model. This model is designed to help create the conditions necessary for individuals to overcome their

barriers and challenges. By placing college classrooms inside existing community focal points, they are strategically placed to connect residents with amenities and social support services aimed at low-income populations. To this end, the initiative aligns with the provincial push to use community hubs (conceived as neighbourhood gathering places) as a way to localize the delivery of social services to underserved populations (Pitre, 2014). In light of forecasted increasing population growth and demand for government funded programs and social services in both the City of Hamilton and the province of Ontario, Hildebrandt et al., (2017) situates the movement towards community hubs as part of a growing trend in network-building and collaborative activity between the community section, postsecondary institutions, and municipal agencies.

Our research has highlighted how the community-based hub model helps to build the connections and networks that exist between students in low-income community contexts. Above all, the neighbourhood-based location of the City School classroom provides students with a postsecondary point of entry that is convenient and non-threatening. As an institutional response to a perceived lack of accessible postsecondary education, the model helps demystify an educational system that many low-income residents feel alienated from. Central to achieving this is the fostering of a relationship of trust between the community and the College. This is particularly salient with regard to discussions of the efficacy of place-based initiatives such as City School that aim to promote greater postsecondary accessibility for low-income individuals. As Andrews (2013, p. 10) notes, such accessibility initiatives can help build “capacity to restore agency and trust to citizens concerning formal structures and processes” (Hildebrandt et al., 2017, p. 24). In other words, the community-based hub model is central to helping students succeed in City School courses and in providing them with a viable pathway to a postsecondary education.

*Research objective 4: Build the capacity and aspirations of residents to be self-advocates and independent learners.*

Our research findings provide insight into the multi-dimensional nature of the challenges that students face when seeking to return to education. In particular, the findings illustrate the confidence-building effects of the program and the ways in which students began to construct a sense of themselves as college students. Having the opportunity to take a course in a convenient and familiar neighbourhood-based setting allows students to explore and/or revive their postsecondary aspirations without having to struggle with, or definitively overcome, the barriers and challenges they have faced in the past.

A key theme that emerged in faculty interviews was how faculty encouraged students to take an active role in their education, and how they worked with students to create inclusive and empowering classroom environments. Our findings have highlighted the importance of the strategies of engagement that instructors employ in the classroom, and of the ongoing importance of reflecting upon and modifying such practices. Throughout interviews, instructors delivered



course content in a way that meets their commitment to empowering students. In achieving this, students are encouraged to take an active role in their learning, and to establish points of connection between course content and their lives. Such findings illustrate the importance of maintaining what Zyngier (2011, p. 221) terms “pedagogical reciprocity” (p. 226), an approach that includes *connection* (linking course content to what students already know), *ownership* (encouraging students to see themselves and their life-worlds in their work), *responding* (e.g. to lived experience), and *empowerment* (viewing students as having the capacity to become active participants in their learning). In other words, the pedagogical model underpinning City School is key to fostering a culture of independent learning for enrolled students.

*Research objective 5: Provide high quality training experiences for Mohawk College students through the provision of experiential learning and training opportunities.*

Throughout the duration of the research project, 22 student research assistants (SRAs) positions were offered as part of the project. Of these, 15 students (7 students had contracts that were extended by one term) received training and mentoring in research methodologies. Students were drawn from Mohawk College's Social Service Worker program. As part of their program of study, these students had previously completed *COMMS2066 Interviewing Skills* and *HMNS10100 Community Awareness and Field Placement Preparation*. Students involved in the research received training and mentoring in qualitative research methodology. The SRAs were involved in the following range of research tasks and activities:

- Research ethics tutorial training.
- Literature searches and reviews on issues facing Hamilton’s low-income neighbourhoods.
- Interview reviews on key topics (adult education, postsecondary access and engagement, teaching underserved populations, social justice education)
- Analysis of existing research data (e.g., ONCAT (2017)-related interview data)
- Thematic analysis of interview transcripts
- Participation in community outreach activities (e.g., various knowledge mobilization events)
- Research project data collection tasks (e.g., interviews).
- Involvement in writing research report summaries (including this document).
- Involvement in manuscript preparation for journal submissions (two students were involved in the co-authoring of a manuscript currently under journal review).

## Recommendations

This section will provide some detailed recommendations and action items for future research into City School by Mohawk and the City School partnership. Each recommendation represents a potential avenue of future research.

### 1. *Researching the gap between registration and completion*

When looking at course data from 2016-2019, a discrepancy exists between students who register for a credit course, or non-credit course or workshop, and those who enroll with a view to completing it. For example, when looking at credit course statistics, 57.5 per cent of students who register do not complete a course (a total of 584 students). In workshops, 51 per cent of students who register for a non-credit course or workshop do not progress to completion (a total of 120). Information gathered thus far on why students register for a course but fail to complete it has been minimal, and usually indicates an employment opportunity or family responsibility as the reason for not being able to continue in a course. We also acknowledge that the ease with which potentially interested residents can register for a course may be a factor in explaining the gap between registration and completion. For example, an individual who spontaneously registers for a course following conversation with a City School team member may reconsider their decision before course commencement. However, there is a need to systematically explore why this gap between registration and completion exists.

### 2. *Connecting with course-non-completers*

A challenge related to the first recommendation lies in gathering data on students who both registered and enrolled in a course but who failed to complete it. Although our findings have provided insight into how the initiative works to mitigate some of the barriers to education that low-income residents face, we recognize that students who responded to our interview request typically had a positive course experience and/or have successfully completed a course. As such, we are cognizant of the exclusion of a student demographic for whom successfully pursuing a postsecondary course of study is a more remote and precarious prospect. Enrolling in a course is taken as an indication of commitment to it, and yet the knowledge we have of why students fail to complete a course remains partial and/or anecdotal. In light of this, the issue of what factors impact student retention warrants further study, particularly for those students who demonstrated clear commitment to a course by attending several weeks of classes but who did not progress to completion.

### *3. Engaging with Indigenous populations*

Further partner collaboration and research could explore how City School could best help alleviate the barriers and challenges to postsecondary and employment for Indigenous individuals (both "at-risk" youth and low-income adults). Minimal and very preliminary research has been conducted on this research avenue thus far. As such, it has not been included in this report. Recommendations include researching the efficacy of indigenizing select courses (both in terms of content and pedagogical approach), connecting with Indigenous learners who transition to a program of study at Mohawk College, and deepening the degree of collaboration between the College and community organizations/ agencies that work with Indigenous populations.

### *4. Tracking the postsecondary persistence of City School students*

The focus of the project has been to explore the efficacy of City School as a community-based response to increasing access to education for underserved populations. Following the growth of the program, however, and in light of there being a steady stream of City School students now transitioning to Mohawk College, there is a need to track their postsecondary persistence and retention levels. In other words, once in the system, how well do students fare? What percentage of students successfully complete a program of study? Ongoing tracking of City School students is an imperative in order to gauge the long-term outcomes and success of City School programming.

### *5. Supporting students on their postsecondary pathway*

There is a need to provide students who transition to a program of study at Mohawk College with the support they need. It is one thing to take a course in a comfortable and non-threatening community-based classroom, characterized by small class sizes and supportive faculty with some they can build a rapport with, but quite another to enroll in a program of study characterized by a more structured learning environment, a full course load, a larger student cohort, less flexibility when it comes to assignment deadlines, and far less direct contact with faculty. Students who have transitioned from City School to a program of study at Mohawk commented on the need to strengthen the support system at the College in order to achieve a smoother transition, including the provision of financial assistance. Part of this involves ensuring that the City School credit students receive is recognized by the program of study they enter into (where applicable). A recommendation would be to have a fulltime contact person or location at the College for former City School students, and/ or a mentoring network of former City School alumni at the College.

## *6. Mapping the postsecondary pathways of City School students*

Research needs to be done regarding the postsecondary pathways of City School students how have transitioned to Mohawk. Table 3 (detailed previously on page 9) provides statistics on the numbers of students who have transitioned to a continuing education course, a full-time program of study, or an apprenticeship program. However, what City School course(s) did they take and was this course beneficial in transitioning to Mohawk? Were students able to use their City School course credit when enrolling? What specific programs of study did students enroll in? Mapping the transition of students would enhance the knowledge we have of the pathways students take and help us evaluate the efficacy of existing City School programming.

## *7. Connecting with students not transitioning to postsecondary*

Partners spoke of how City School programming helps raise the aspirational horizons of participants. However, there remains a need to strengthen the support students receive following course completion by providing services to them to cope with the barriers to education/employment they continue to struggle with (e.g., academic upgrading, ESL, mental health, financial limitations). Partners commented on the need to provide additional support/ steps for students who have completed one or two City School courses but who may not yet be ready to enrol in a postsecondary program of study, or who may require additional guidance in planning an employment rather than postsecondary pathway. Such a support system could serve to better integrate the partners' services as an extended network system aligned with City School programming (and thereby avoid the need to create an additional support system).

## *8. Developing/ expanding City School programming*

There are two dimensions to this recommendation. First, a number of partner respondents ruminated as to the possibility and viability of implementing a more robust form of City School programming involving the community-based delivery of postsecondary certificates or even diplomas. Although participants enthused on the benefits of City School in providing residents with a taste of postsecondary, several respondents speculated as to the potential of expanding the extent to which a more robust form of City School programming could be embedded in the community (through the offering of a certificate program, for example). A second possibility suggested by partners is to begin offering micro-credential-focused programming centred on building the skill-sets of participants, particularly for individuals more intent on building their employment readiness.

## *9. Conducting a joint Partner evaluation*

The co-location of City School programming and service delivery (such as is found in the Eva Rothwell Centre and Hamilton Central Library) suggests that a joint program evaluation would be mutually beneficial between partners, in addition to encouraging closer collaboration. For example, the placement of a City School classroom in the Central Library branch is designed to encourage participating students on a pathway to education, but to what extent does this also operate as a pathway to the greater utilization of library resources? Following completion of a City School course, do participants continue to use the library, and in what way? Do they feel more comfortable doing so? This recommendation is also indicative of the appetite among partners to draw upon the research capacity of College, particularly in light of how a precarious funding climate limits the research capacity of community-based agencies/ organizations.

## *10. Building research capacity at Mohawk College*

As the previous nine recommendations have stressed, the project has highlighted the value of having dedicated research personnel focused on researching issues pertaining to postsecondary access and engagement. Without sufficient research capacity, any recommendations resulting from the research remain as such. In light of City School being, in essence, an evidence-based response to poverty and a lack of educational opportunities for low-income residents, maintaining ongoing research capacity is a necessity. Such research deepens the dialogue we have with community partners and helps maintain the relevance and direction of the initiative. For example, a long-term research trajectory could be to begin accumulating and synthesizing data that would allow the College to build an economic case for City School, in terms of its impact on levels of postsecondary attainment, employment rates, and labour market outcomes in targeted neighbourhoods.

## **Conclusion**

The research project has explored the efficacy of City School by Mohawk in creating accessible pathways to postsecondary study for residents in the City of Hamilton. Drawing primarily upon interview data, the research has deepened the knowledge we have of the barriers and challenges that residents from low-income communities face in pursuing a postsecondary pathway. Notwithstanding the relative infancy of City School, our research has illustrated the potential of its transformative impact for both individuals and communities. Critical to the impact of City School is the underlying community-driven and multi-sectoral nature of the collaboration. In exploring the workings of the City School Partnership, the research has enhanced the knowledge we have of the collaborative nature of the partnership and its crucial

importance in breaking down barriers to education for residents. In addition, the research has contributed to an emerging body of evidence regarding the efficacy of place-based postsecondary access initiatives, in addition to contributing to a province -wide conversation on the value of utilizing community hubs in addressing community needs. As Gaffikin and Morrissey (2008) have argued, the contribution postsecondary institutions can and should make to building capacity in underserved neighbourhoods through robust strategies of community engagement needs to extend beyond the limitations of a traditional outreach model. In such terms, City School represents a socially innovative and evidence-based model of campus-community engagement.

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## Appendix A: Knowledge Mobilization activities

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### Project knowledge mobilization outputs (2016-2019)

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Scholarly publications (*published, submitted, and in-progress*)

- 2019 Bourke, A., Vanderveken, J., Ecker, E., Atkinson, J., & Shearer, N. [\*Bringing College Classrooms to the Community: Promoting Postsecondary Access for Low-Income Adults Through Neighbourhood-Based College Courses\*](#), *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 49(1), 159-175.
- 2019 Bourke, A., Vanderveken, J., Ecker, E., Bell, H., & Richie, K. *Teaching is a learning process: Exploring faculty engagement with low-income adult learners in a college-community partnership program* (under journal review)
- 2019 Bourke, A., Tascón, C., Vanderveken, J., & Ecker. *Rethinking postsecondary accessibility for low-income students through a campus-community partnership program* (manuscript under preparation).

### Conferences

- 2018 Vanderveken, J., Ecker, E., & Bourke, A. *Creating pathways to postsecondary education*, Colleges Institutes Canada (CiCan) Annual Conference, Victoria, BC.
- 2018 Bourke, A. *Access strategies: Reaching out to underrepresented groups*. Access in Practice. Annual conference, Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). Toronto.
- 2017 Vanderveken, J., & Ecker, E. *The City School Model (workshop) and Resident-led Engagement (workshop)*, Ontario Community Hubs Summit. Toronto.
- 2017 Bourke, A. *City School by Mohawk: A community-built response to improving access to education*. Canadian Society for the study of Higher Education, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Toronto.
- 2017 Bourke, A. *Rethinking postsecondary accessibility through community-based learning hubs*. Canadian Society for the study of Higher Education, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Toronto.
- 2017 Bourke, A. *Exploring transfer pathways to postsecondary in a community-built response to improving access to education*. Canadian Sociological Association, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Toronto.
- 2017 Bourke, A., Soluk, L., & Atkinson, J. [\*Building pathways to post-secondary education for at-risk students and vulnerable youth through community-based\*](#)

- [learning hubs](#). Student Pathways in Higher Education Conference, Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). Toronto.
- 2017 Bourke, A., Ecker, E., Shearer, N., & Atkinson, J. *The City School Approach to Education and Poverty Reduction*. Tamarack Institute: Cities Reducing Poverty: When Business is engaged. Hamilton.
- 2016 Bourke, A. *Social innovation for change and inclusiveness* (Panel participant), Colleges Institutes Canada (CiCan) conference on Applied Research, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation Forum. Seneca College. Toronto.

## Community Reports

- 2018 City School Community Report (Summer)
- 2018 City School Community Report (Winter)
- 2017 City School Community Report (Fall)
- 2017 City School Community Report (Winter)

## Media

- 2018 Bourke, A., & Harvie, S. City School Turns 3! *Hamilton Spectator*.
- 2017 Colleges Institutes Canada (CiCAN). Innovation Showcase: [\*\*A community-built response to improving access to education\*\*](#) (click highlighted link to access website)

## Knowledge mobilization events

- 2019 Poster presentation at the IDEAWORKS 2019 Research Expo, Mohawk College.
- 2019 Knowledge mobilization event, Mohawk College (presentation by Clara Tascón).
- 2018 City School BBQ, Eva Rothwell Centre, Hamilton.
- 2017 City School breakfast, Hamilton Public Library (Central Branch), Hamilton.
- 2017 City School BBQ, Eva Rothwell Centre, Hamilton.

## Steering Committee Meetings

- 2019 Fall Steering Committee Meeting (October)
- 2018 Fall Steering Committee Meeting (September)
- 2017 Spring Steering Committee Meeting (April)
- 2017 Winter Steering Committee Meeting (February)
- 2016 Fall Steering Committee Meeting (November)