



STILL STREAMED: HOW HIGH IMPACT DECISIONS ARE SHAPING STUDENTS' FUTURES

September, 2017

ABOUT SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO

Social Planning Toronto is a non-profit, charitable community organization that works to improve equity, social justice and quality of life in Toronto through community capacity building, community education and advocacy, policy research and analysis, and social reporting.

Social Planning Toronto is committed to building a “Civic Society” one in which diversity, equity, social and economic justice, interdependence and active civic participation are central to all aspects of our lives - in our families, neighbourhoods, voluntary and recreational activities and in our politics.

To find this report and learn more about Social Planning Toronto, visit <http://socialplanningtoronto.org>.

STILL STREAMED:

HOW HIGH IMPACT DECISIONS ARE SHAPING STUDENTS' FUTURES

© Social Planning Toronto

ISBN: 978-1894-199-40-7

Published in Toronto
by Social Planning Toronto
2 Carlton St. Suite 1001
Toronto, ON M5B 1J3

REPORT LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Ravi Joshi and Carl Carganilla



This report was proudly produced with unionized labour.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REPORT AUTHORS

Sharma Queiser, Social Planning Toronto

Sabrina De Araujo, Social Planning Toronto

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Anteneh Gedamu, Social Planning Toronto

Ramla Abukar, Peer Researcher

Andre Harriott, Peer Researcher

Fitriya Mohamed Hussein, Peer Researcher

Ascia Ibrahim, Peer Researcher

Kofi Kumi, Peer Researcher

Tameka Messam, Peer Researcher

RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE - COALITION FOR ALTERNATIVES TO STREAMING IN EDUCATION (CASE)

Joseph Amankrah, Camara Skills Training Network
& Ryerson University

Alexandra Arraiz, Working Women Community
Centre

Cutty Duncan, ANC Mount Dennis/Social Planning
Toronto

Diana Grimaldos, Working Women Community
Centre

George Martin

Winston Tinglin

Marjolein Winterink

SPECIAL THANKS TO

All the people who helped to promote and recruit
participants for this study

All the students and parents who shared their
experiences

We also wish to extend our gratitude to the City
of Toronto and the United Way Toronto and
York Region for their continued funding and
ongoing support of Social Planning Toronto, and
the Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding this
project



United Way
Toronto & York Region

www.unitedwaytyr.com



Ontario
Trillium
Foundation



Fondation
Trillium
de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Across Ontario, grade 8 students are required to register for high school courses which are classified into three levels: academic, applied, and locally developed/essentials. Typically, students take the majority of their courses at the same level, constituting a stream or pathway. Not only do these decisions impact students' educational pathways through high school, they can have significant bearing on their post-secondary and career options.

While our education system strives to level the playing field for marginalized students, children of colour and lower income students are over-represented in lower streams which can limit their future opportunities and may not reflect their goals or potential.

RESEARCH STUDY

While much research has been done on streaming, students' and parents' perspectives and experiences have not been widely captured. This study was designed to fill this gap by documenting families' lived experiences of the course selection process in a high-need, urban neighbourhood. To better understand how streaming practices surfaced in the everyday experiences of families, this study explored the processes and influences affecting high school course selection. A total of 52 in-depth interviews were conducted with students and parents in the greater Weston-Mount Dennis area in Toronto.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Grade 8 may be too early to make such an important decision that will have long-term consequences. Many students felt they didn't have the maturity in grade 8 to make these decisions and could have used more individualized support when making these choices for the first time. While guidance counsellors would appear to be the most appropriate source for this, few schools currently have the capacity to accommodate this.

Factors in decision making are complex.

Students' choices were shaped by numerous different and sometimes contradictory factors when selecting their courses for high school. This included the amount and type of classroom opportunities and support available, as well as their interests, abilities, future aspirations, and self-perception. To varying degrees, they also consulted with their family, teachers, and peers but often expressed a need for added support during this process.

Students and parents navigate a patchwork of information about course selection.

Students in this neighbourhood understood the "applied" pathway to be the mainstream pathway but shared no consistent understanding of the difference between applied and academic level courses. Since parents reported accessing most information through their child, this would also impact the information they receive.

Both parents and students alike expressed the need for more information and/or one-on-one support during the course selection process that responds to individual circumstances. To facilitate this, engagement and communication strategies need to reflect the diverse communities being served.

Placement reflects past performance and may restrict future growth. Most students believed that placement in applied or academic levels courses is based on achievement levels and therefore students could move up to a higher level if they exerted enough effort. However, for those students who actively tried to make an upward transition, mandatory transfer courses deterred or prevented them. As a result, once students chose their courses in grade 9, they were on a path that was difficult to change and which impacted their future post-secondary and career options.

Encouragement and one-on-one support makes a difference. Students valued teachers who they had a personal relationship with and would sometimes seek advice from these teachers regarding their course selection. However, the informal nature of this role suggests that it may not be a reliable tool unless teachers are supported, trained, and allocated time specifically for this purpose. Further effort should be made to systematize connections between guidance counsellors and students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite provincial claims that streaming has been abolished, quantitative data demonstrates that students are organized into structured pathways which significantly impact their access to post-secondary and career opportunities. This is especially detrimental to low-income and marginalized students who are over-represented in lower level courses. Without the maturity and support to fully grasp the weight of these decisions, some students are unknowingly following a path which inhibits them from reaching their full potential.

Findings from this research indicate some key considerations to improve the course selection and streaming processes in Ontario. This will require making de-streaming policies currently in place more effective by reviewing the practices identified in this report and developing a plan to alter the current process, including delaying any selection of education pathways as late in a students' education as possible.

The complete list of recommendations is included on page 33.

INTRODUCTION

Today high schools face unprecedented challenges in preparing young people for adulthood, a rapidly changing workforce, and lifelong learning. As our education system endeavors to set young people on the path to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives, graduates must also be ready for a future that may include multiple careers, a non-linear path, and employment in jobs that do not currently exist.¹

At the same time, the public education system has a central responsibility to level the playing field for students who face marginalization and disadvantage. All students should have access to the learning opportunities and resources they need, as well as challenging, high-quality curriculum, and chances to explore and develop their individual interests. Further, barriers that prevent students from obtaining a high level of success and achieving their full potential should be removed.

However, underlying inequities persist and impact the type and quality of education that some students receive. Specifically, high school students from marginalized groups are far more likely to be enrolled in non-academic courses which do not necessarily match their potential, interests, and future career goals.² With lower expectations, more limited opportunities to learn, and fewer post-secondary options, this practice of academic streaming perpetuates existing social hierarchies and inequities.³

These patterns persevere despite the introduction of provincial policy more than 15 years ago that was intended to end streaming in secondary schools.

¹ Peterson & Hamlin, 2017; Gordon, 2017.

² Clandfield et al, 2014.

³ *ibid.*

STREAMING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Streaming, also known as tracking, is the practice of grouping students into courses based on perceived ability and/or presumed post-secondary destination. As an organizational practice, streaming is claimed to facilitate teaching as it allows teachers to tailor classes according to the ability level of their students and consequently increase learning opportunities.⁴ However, contrary to its objectives, some literature suggests that separating students by ability level can have significant, and often adverse, consequences for students' academic, social, psychological and economic future.⁵ Since the literature also indicates that the groupings students are assigned to may not strongly reflect students' capacities or goals,⁶ there is good reason to be concerned about this practice and its impacts.

PROVINCIAL POLICY

Prior to 1999, Ontario students were streamed into three different pathways starting in grade 9: basic, general, and advanced. These three tracks prepared students for certain post-secondary destinations: workplace, apprenticeship or

college, and university respectively. This historic practice of ability grouping was publicly criticized for perpetuating disadvantage and maintaining privilege: students from low-income households were disproportionately enrolled in lower streams and students from high-income households were over-represented in higher streams.⁷ While new policy introduced in 1999, *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9-12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999 (OSS:99)*, formally eliminated overt streaming, the practice of separating students into academic and non-academic pathways continues to occur in Ontario secondary schools today.⁸

The OSS:99 policy called for uniformly rigorous criteria and high flexibility in allowing students to mix non-academic (applied and essentials) and academic courses. This structure promised to provide "a graduated streaming of courses in Grades 9 to 12 that will keep options open for all students in the earlier grades and prepare students in senior grades for their future destinations".⁹

However, as discussed below, research shows that despite these changes, students are often placed within structured pathways which unfairly disadvantage those from marginalized and low-income households.

4 Hallinan, 1994.

5 Gamoran, 1992; Hallinan, 1994; Brunello & Checchi, 2007.

6 Clandfield et al., 2014; Hamlin & Cameron, 2015.

7 Curtis, Livingstone & Smaller, 1992.

8 People for Education, 2014.

9 Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p.13.

PROGRAMS OF STUDY

The latest streaming structure in Ontario requires students to choose courses that are classified as academic, applied, and locally developed/essentials in grades 9 and 10. In grades 11 and 12, students then choose courses that are categorized as university, university/college, college, or workplace, which prepare them for post-secondary opportunities accordingly. The courses a student takes in grades 9 and 10 affect the options they can choose from in grades 11 and 12. Open courses are optional courses available at all grade levels and serve to foster students' skills and knowledge in a subject area. They are accessible to all students and are not designed with any particular post-secondary destination in mind.¹⁰

Students tend to take the majority of their courses at the same level. This constitutes a stream or track, also sometimes referred to as a pathway or program of study. Very few students transfer between levels. In a recent Ontario-wide survey, 91% of principals reported that students "never" or "not very often" transfer from applied to academic level courses.¹¹

These pathways remain consistent throughout the senior years of high school. According to data from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB):

- 90.2% of students who took university level courses had been in the academic pathway for Grades 9-10; and
- 74.9% of students who took college level courses had been in the applied pathway for Grades 9-10.¹²

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Throughout elementary school, student's level of achievement influences how they move from one grade to the next. Students can make these transitions in one of two ways: either by "promotion" or "transfer".¹³ Students are promoted when they have met the curriculum expectations across all subjects. Since policies restrict schools from keeping students within their current grade for a second year,¹⁴ students who have not met the curriculum standards are almost always transferred to the next grade. Whether a student is transferred or promoted to grade 9 is a strong indicator of their pathway through high school. Particularly, students who are promoted from grade 8 to grade 9 are far more prevalent in academic courses (93%), as compared to applied (43.4%) and essentials (3.3%) courses.¹⁵ Those who had been transferred, are far fewer in the academic stream (4.5%), but make up the majority of students in the applied (53.5%) and the essentials (91.4%) pathways.¹⁶

¹⁰ Toronto District School Board, 2016.

¹¹ People for Education, 2013.

¹² Parekh, 2013.

¹³ Toronto District School Board, 2013.

¹⁴ Parekh, 2014.

¹⁵ Parekh, 2013.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

LITERATURE ON STREAMING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Students' life opportunities are influenced by the pathway they take in high school. In Ontario, these decisions are made by the beginning of grade 9, when children are 13 and 14 years old, and are typically based on their overall academic achievement up to that point. Accordingly, streaming processes and students' experiences throughout elementary school can have significant bearing on students' pathways in high school.¹⁷

RACE, CLASS, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Scholars, education professionals, and stakeholders have critiqued streaming for maintaining achievement gaps and inequality. Students in the low and middle streams are held to lower standards and, as a result, their educational experience suffers and their social mobility is limited.¹⁸ Research shows that schools with students of diverse races and social statuses tend to recreate social hierarchies within the school system by over-placing students of colour and low-income students in lower streams. Specifically, self-identified Black and Aboriginal students are over-represented in the applied and essentials pathways, while self-identified East Asian and South Asian students are over-represented in the academic pathway.¹⁹

Students in non-academic streams are also more likely to come from lower income families as compared to those enrolled in academic streams.²⁰

Streaming contributes to racial and class-based imbalance by limiting social and economic mobility of certain groups.²¹ Lack of access to post-secondary opportunities for racialized and low-income students who are over-represented in non-academic streams reproduces systemic biases and maintains current social inequities. Students who graduate from non-academic streams are less likely to graduate within four years and are less likely to apply for postsecondary education.²² Even though the applied pathway is considered preparation for college, the majority of students who accept an offer to college take either university or university/college courses in grade 12.²³

The education system in Ontario is valued as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty. However, the over-placement of marginalized students into lower streams limits their life chances, ability to reach their full potential, and escape intergenerational disadvantage.

¹⁷ Clandfield et al., 2014.

¹⁸ Burris & Welner, 2005; Gamoran, 1992; Wells & Oakes, 1996; Brunello & Checchi, 2007.

¹⁹ Parekh, 2013.

²⁰ Parekh, 2013; Clandfield et al., 2014.

²¹ Brunello & Checchi, 2007.

²² Parekh, 2013; Zeman, 2007.

²³ Parekh, 2013.

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Teachers' expectations are a key contributor to student success. Research shows that students tend to perform according to teachers' expectations and, additionally, students' performances are closely associated with the quality of relationships they have with teachers.²⁴ While generally teachers are supportive of students' futures, some studies show teachers may be less supportive towards "low-achieving" students.²⁵ Though concerned about students' learning, teachers may feel less optimistic about their futures and adjust their teaching styles in response. Sorhagen (2013) found that early teacher expectations influence academic achievement in high school, especially for low-income and minority students, and suggests that it is the result of self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom. Teacher support, or lack of support, can also influence students' interest in a subject and students' self-efficacy.²⁶

DE-STREAMING PRACTICES

De-streaming is a process in which streaming practices are dismantled and students are placed in mixed ability, or heterogeneous, classes.²⁷ Research suggests the most successful examples of de-streaming initiatives include reform at the instructional, institutional, and ideological levels.²⁸ As students are placed in heterogeneous classes, instructional practices are altered to respond (i.e. through differentiated instruction). De-streaming initiatives also need to engage with the underlying belief systems of students, teachers, and the community. Through these efforts, conventional conceptions of intelligence as being fixed are deconstructed and all students are viewed as capable and able to define their own futures. Importantly, teachers view themselves as powerful agents in students' learning.²⁹ De-streaming practices ensure that all students have access to high-quality curriculum, teachers, and resources, no matter their social location or perceived ability.³⁰

Countries such as Poland offer mixed ability classes and have made impressive achievement in the past decade with this strategy. By delaying streaming for an extra year, the percentage of high math performers increased from 10% to 17% and low math performing students decreased from 22% to 14% in less than a decade.³¹

24 Segedin, 2012.

25 *ibid.*

26 Yu & Singh, 2016.

27 Rubin, 2006.

28 Rubin, 2006; Oakes, Wells, Jones & Datnow, 1997.

29 *ibid.*

30 Rubin, 2006.

31 People for Education, 2014.

In Ontario, Granite Ridge Education Centre, a small school serving children in kindergarten to grade 12, has also seen great promise in the introduction of mixed math courses: teachers reported improved behaviour, performance, and time on task.³² The Toronto District School Board has too been piloting initiatives where academic courses are offered instead of applied curricula.³³ These pilots have had very positive results. For example, C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute piloted an Academic grade 9 Africentric English course. A total of 56 students took the course, 23 of whom had selected grade 9 applied English on their course selection sheet. Fifty-four of the 56 students achieved academic curriculum standards.³⁴ A collaborative inquiry of this and other pilot programs at the TDSB led authors to their main recommendation: phase out streaming.³⁵

For almost three decades de-streaming practices have been promoted by the public, debated by decision makers, and even piloted by school boards.³⁶ People for Education and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) advocate for delaying streaming practices until later grades. The existing literature suggests that delaying streaming allows students more time to identify their needs and aspirations and seek suitable strategies to achieve their future goals.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

While streaming can take many forms, from different types of schools to differential treatment of students,³⁷ this research study focused on the formal and informal streaming of secondary students into different pathways. Given the systemic, unobtrusive, and nuanced nature of current streaming processes, this research study explored the lived experiences of parents and students in selecting courses for high school. The study identifies some of the practical mechanisms by which the process continues to impact student outcomes, an area currently lacking in literature on streaming. Much of the previous research has focused on how socioeconomic positions influences students' opportunities without offering much insight on families' individual capacities to maneuver and change these processes.

We sought to gauge students' and parents' level of support for and knowledge of course selection and better understand what factors influence these decisions. With a focus on residents in the Weston-Mount Dennis area, this study highlighted the experiences of racialized and low-income residents in underserved areas.

³² Hamlin & Cameron, 2015.

³³ San Vicente, Sultana & Seck, 2015.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Clandfield et al., 2014.

³⁷ *ibid.*

METHODS

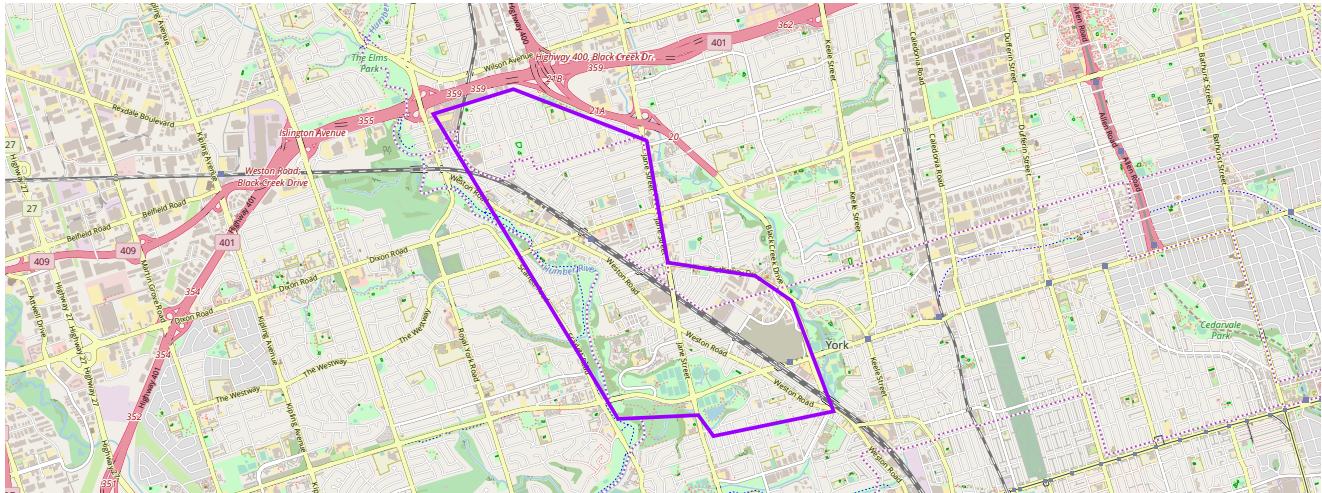
This research project was a community-based initiative which strove to include youth and community input in all stages of the research process.

The Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education (CASE) provided community advisory support for this project. CASE is a group of Toronto-based organizations, community groups, and individuals committed to promoting student success and ending the practice of streaming in public schools.

Six young people were recruited as peer researchers for this project. All of the peer researchers either lived or previously lived in the York South-Weston area and had attended public schools. They attended two training sessions on high school course selection and community-based research and interview strategies. Each peer researcher also shadowed the lead researcher on at least one interview to develop their skills and ensure continuity among interviews.

CASE members and the peer researchers helped to develop the research methods, tools, and outreach strategies. To unpack the processes related to streaming this project documented the lived experiences of parents and students in selecting high school courses. Two interview guides were developed which explored the level of support and knowledge families receive in making these decisions. These guides also looked at what factors influence these decisions and how the process can be improved.

Participants were recruited through community organizations, word-of-mouth, neighbourhood advertisements, and social networks. Students, and parents of students, who took at least one of their high school courses at the applied level within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) were eligible to participate. Participants either lived or went to school in the Weston-Mount Dennis area. Students had to be at least 16 years of age to be eligible to participate without parental consent. The parent and student samples are not matching (i.e. parents who participated were not the parents of the students who participated).

Fig 1 - Map of the Weston Mount Dennis Area

The Weston and Mount Dennis neighbourhoods were selected because these neighbourhoods face a number of challenges as outlined in its designation as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA) by the City of Toronto (see City of Toronto, 2014a and City of Toronto, 2014b respectively). These neighbourhoods face inequities in terms of marginalization, low-income, and rates of high school graduation and post-secondary completion, among others. Additionally, through the Action for Neighbourhood Change - Mount Dennis, residents from these neighbourhoods identified education as a key concern and area for improvement.

The peer researchers conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews with students and parents. The interviews were held at community organizations or in community spaces, such as a common room in an apartment building. The interviews varied in length from twenty minutes to one and a half hours and were audio-recorded. A total of 52 usable interviews were conducted; 39 with students and 13 with parents (See Profiles for demographic information on

these two groups). Each participant received a cash honorarium and two transit tokens for participating in an interview.

Following verbatim transcription, interviews were coded using the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo10. Themes were first identified by the lead researcher and then brought to CASE for further feedback, refinement, and analysis.

Preliminary findings were presented at Social Planning Toronto's Education Forum "How Choices in High School Affect Your Future" in March 2017. This event was held at the York Civic Centre and engaged residents in a discussion on high school course selection, how their experiences were similar/dissimilar to the research findings, and how the course selection process could be improved.

Feedback from that event was used to inform a more detailed analysis of the findings and the development of report recommendations.

PROFILE OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

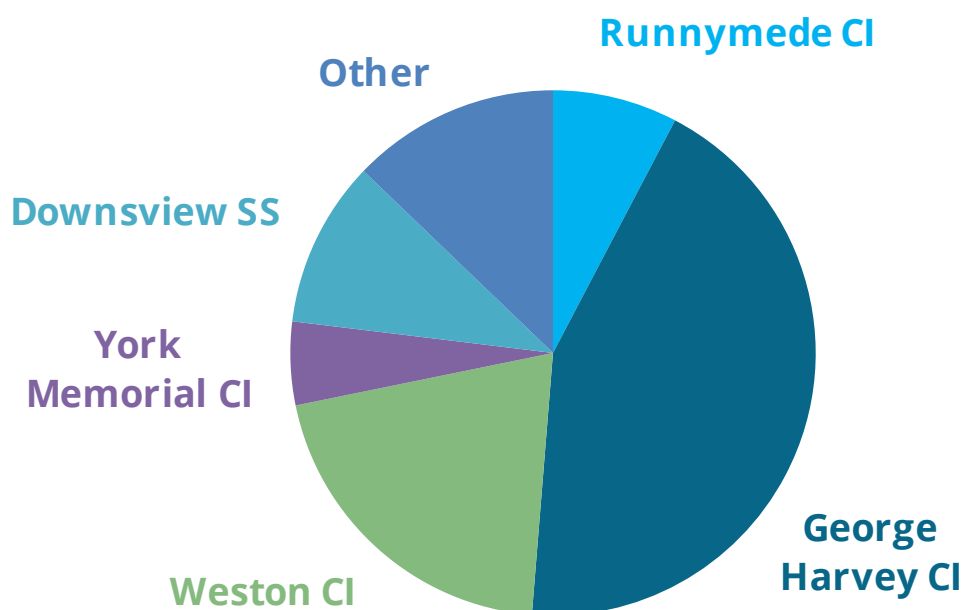
Interviews were conducted with 39 students; 27 males and 12 females. Their ages ranged from 15 to 19, with the mode being 17 years of age. The students were from all high school grades (9 to 12), with most them being in grades 11 (36%) and 12 (51%).

Collectively the students were attending 10 different TDSB high schools within and around the Weston-Mount Dennis area (see Fig. 2).

The students had attended a variety of elementary schools. The most common elementary schools were Portage Trail Community School, H J Alexander Community School, Brookhaven Public School, Rockcliffe Middle School, and C R Marchant Middle School. Twenty percent (20%) had attended elementary schools outside of Canada.

Most the students self-identified as Black (69%); 15% identified as Filipino; and the others identified as Indonesian, West Indian, or as having multiple ethnic backgrounds. About a quarter (28%) said English was not their first language and about a third (36%) said they were born outside of Canada.

Fig 2 - Students' Current High School

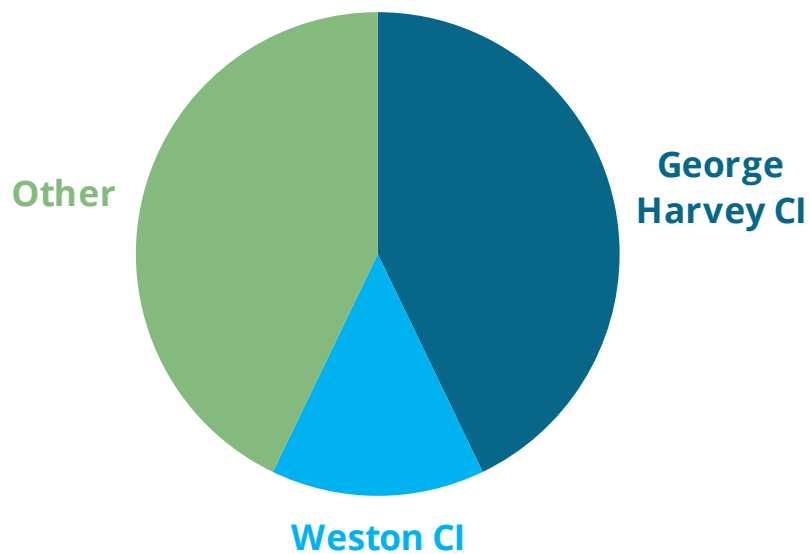


PROFILE OF PARENT PARTICIPANTS

Interviews were conducted with 13 parents; 5 males and 8 females. Collectively, the parents had children in every grade of high school (9 to 12), as well as having recently graduated or dropped out of school. About one third had a child in grade 11 and a third had a child in grade 12. One parent had two high school aged children.

The parents had children who attended a variety of high schools within and outside of the Weston-Mount Dennis neighbourhood (see Fig. 3).

Fig 3 - Child's Current High School



Two-thirds of the parents self-identified as Black; others identified as Chinese, White, Métis or as having multiple ethnic backgrounds. All of the parents said English was their first language and the majority (83%) were born in Canada.

Most of the parents had either one (46%) or two (38%) children. The majority of the parents (85%) said they were not currently married or in a common-law relationship. The parents had various educational levels (see Fig. 4) and employment statuses (see Fig. 5). Three parents self-identified as living with a disability.

Fig 4 - Parents' Highest Level of Education

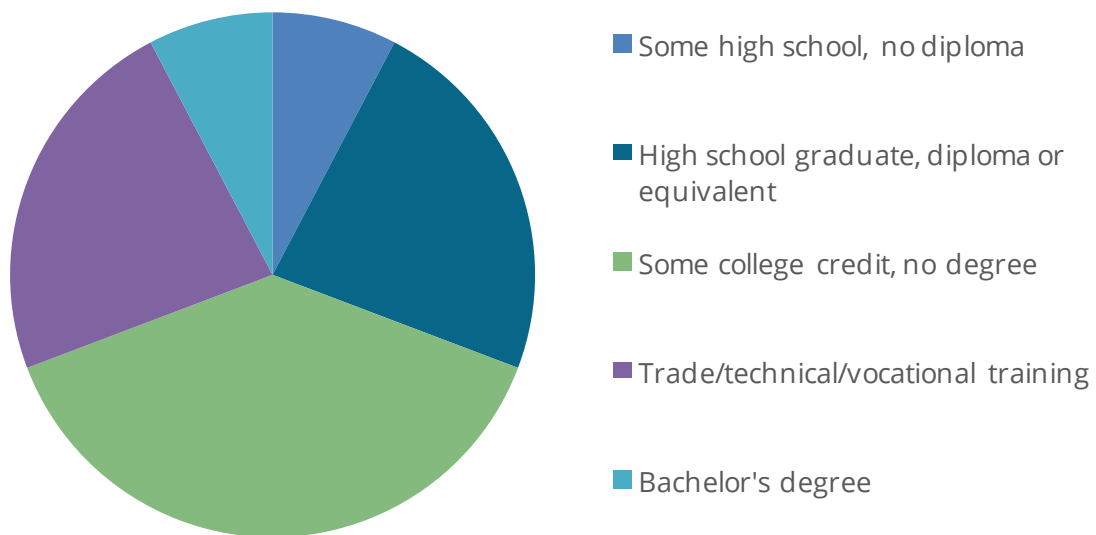
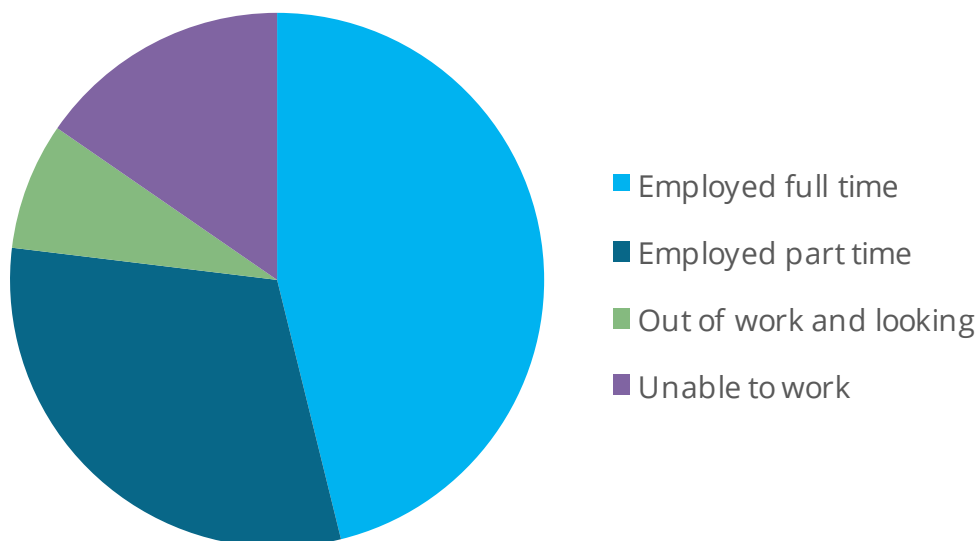


Fig 5 - Parents' Employment Status



STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study recruited participants largely through community organizations and service providers. While the student sample is large enough to provide rich and diverse information, the experiences of the students who are most disengaged from the education system may not have been captured. However, given the challenges that emerged with our sample, we can reasonably conclude that students less engaged in the education system will face even greater barriers. The group is not a random sample and the conclusions derived from the data cannot be extrapolated to specific statistical frequencies. However, the sample does allow researchers to conclude that these issues are real and have significant impact for some students in the TDSB.

Many parents were approached for this study who could not be engaged to participate in an interview. Outreach strategies were modified on several occasions in attempts to overcome engagement barriers (e.g. increasing participant honoraria or allowing interviews to be conducted over the phone rather than in person). Despite these efforts, our target sample size of 30 was not reached for the parent group. This suggests that parents may face multiple barriers to participation and that our findings reflect the views and experiences of those parents who are more readily engaged. Notably, the parent sample also fails to capture the experiences of parents who recently immigrated to Canada and those who do not speak English as their first language.

The challenges encountered in this research project suggest that conventional outreach may

not be effective for engaging parents in this topic.

This study was also confined to a relatively small geographical area. While this was an intentional component of the research design aimed to better understanding the experiences racialized and low-income residents in an underserved neighbourhood, it may have restricted the research. The experiences of residents in other neighbourhoods has not been captured. Students and parents who participated in this research were more likely to be from similar socio-economic backgrounds and may have had similar school experiences as a result. This means that, for example, this research did not capture the experiences of other students who experience marginalization or those in other neighbourhoods.

The relationship between Special Education Needs and placement in applied and essentials level courses was not explored through this research. Even though research indicates that a significant number of students with Special Education Needs are enrolled in applied and essentials courses,³⁸ this was not a critical factor raised by students or parents and may require additional investigation through future research.

Additionally, this research study did not capture the complexities of the course selection process for those students who enter the TDSB after grade 9, which largely consists of students who are new to Canada. For these students, who did not make up a significant portion of our sample, the course selection process may look different and these intricacies were not reflected in this research.

³⁸ Parekh, 2013.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

FINDING: GRADE 8 STUDENTS AREN'T ADEQUATELY PREPARED

A strong theme emerging from this research is that grade 8 students are not adequately prepared to make important decisions that will have long-term consequences.

A few students were concerned that some elementary students are transferred to the next grade level without achieving the curriculum expectations for their current grade. They were worried that this practice left some students unprepared for the rigor required in high school. They emphasized the importance of elementary school on equipping children with the knowledge, habits, and skills needed to succeed in high school. Others mentioned that the level of achievement a student has in grade 8 heavily influences the pathway they take in high school which, in turn, influences their access to post-secondary and labour market opportunities.

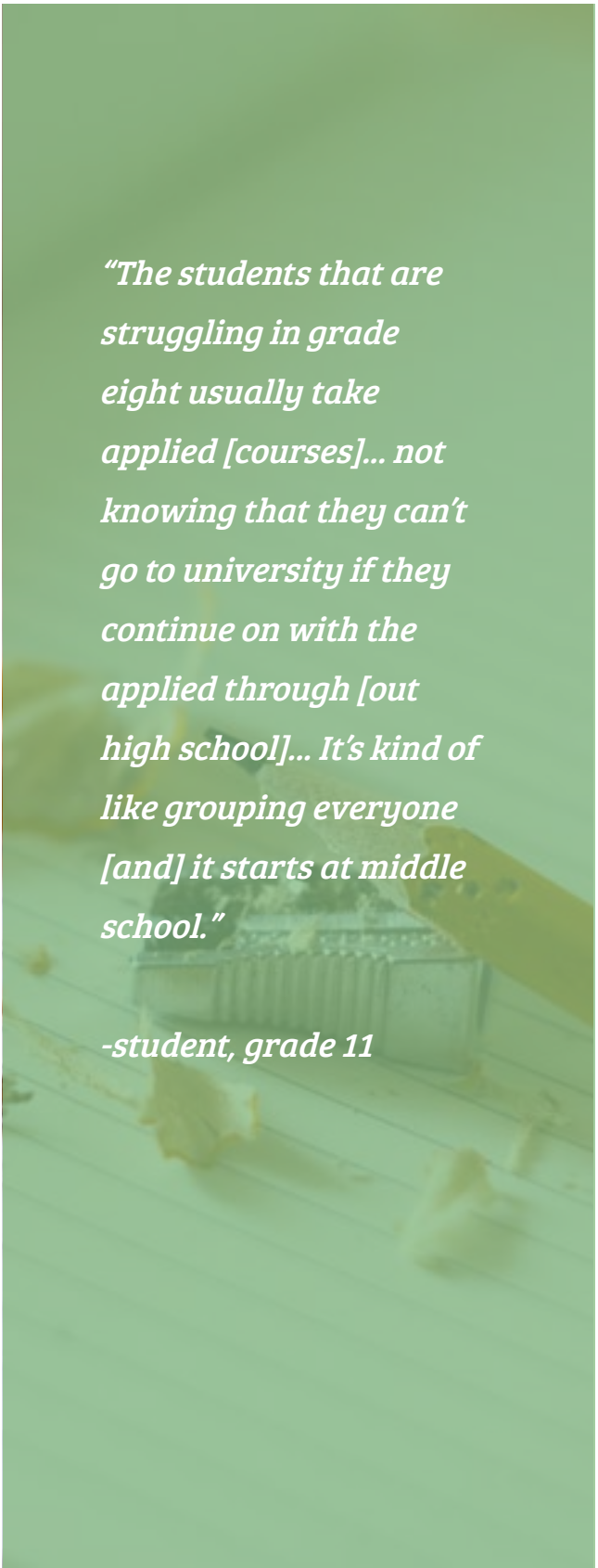
In addition, many students said they could have used more or better support in grade 8 when they were choosing high school courses for the first time. A number of students described going through a stage of personal growth during high school. They spoke about how they did not care very much about school in grades 8 and 9, did not want to put effort into school, and had poor attendance. However, as they got older their priorities changed and they took school matters more seriously. Some now felt they were playing catch-up and others felt they were on the wrong path all together.

A few parents also recognized that grade 8 was quite early to be making these decisions and proposed some ways to remedy this. One suggested increasing the level of parental involvement when these decisions are being made in grades 8, 9, and 10. Another parent suggested only offering academic level courses in grades 9 and 10.

ANALYSIS: CURRENT SYSTEM NARROWS FUTURE OPTIONS AT AN EARLY AGE

Within the current system, many grade 8 students are choosing their courses without the wisdom or support needed to ensure they are truly informed decisions. This sets students on a path that is often difficult to change.

Students' experiences in elementary school should provide the foundation for success in secondary school. However, as previously mentioned, a student's achievement in grade 8 and whether they are promoted or transferred to high school are strong indicators of the pathway they'll take in grade 9 and throughout high school. Students who are not supported to overcome barriers and achieve a high standard of learning may continue to fall through the cracks and have limited post-secondary options.



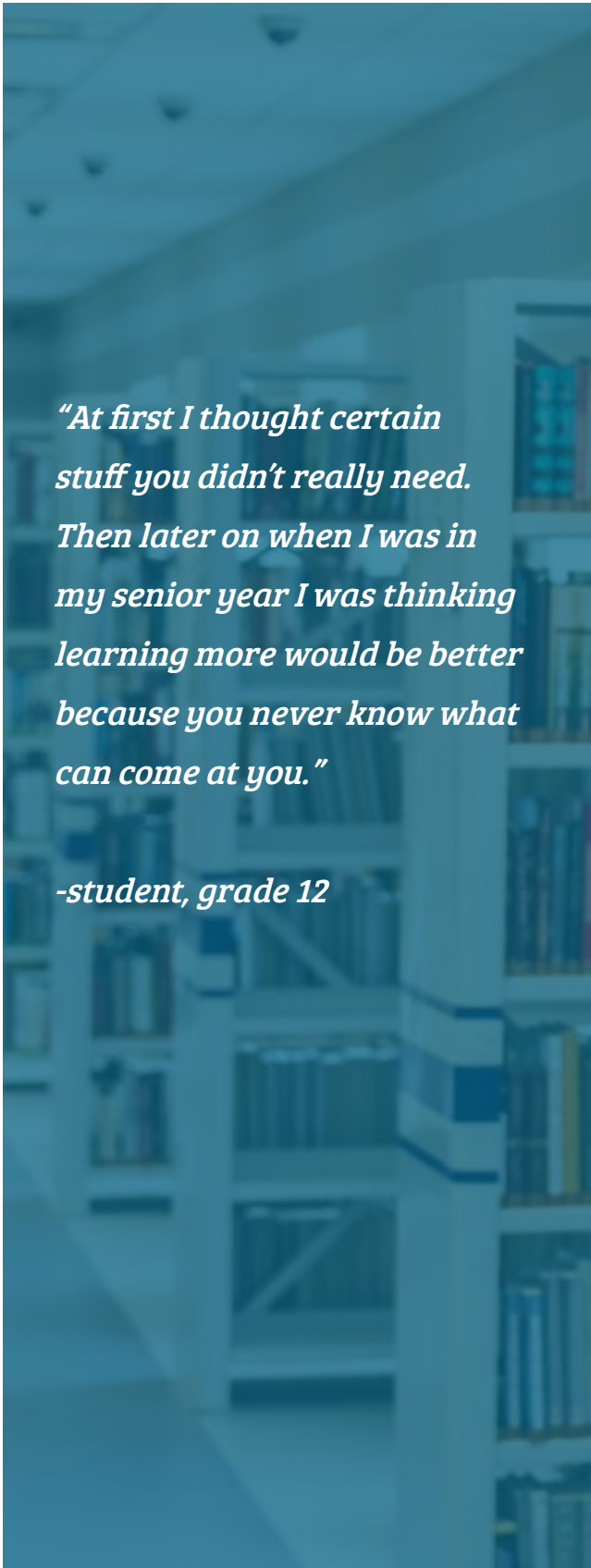
"The students that are struggling in grade eight usually take applied [courses]... not knowing that they can't go to university if they continue on with the applied through [out high school]... It's kind of like grouping everyone [and] it starts at middle school."

-student, grade 11

The process of streaming students begins in elementary school. Differential treatment, both intentional and unintentional, based on student's socio-economic backgrounds results in very different levels of achievement.³⁹ For example, students are grouped among and within classes based on their assumed abilities and/or interests. This can take place within regular schools, or may be done through placements in special education programs or specialty programs, such as alternative schools and French immersion.

This disparity in treatment and outcomes is the result of an system in which ability grouping is used, ostensibly to facilitate effective teaching and learning, despite mixed evidence.⁴⁰

In the face of these barriers, our research also suggests that grade 8 is too early to require young people to make important life decisions, including the pathway they will take through high school. From the age of 13 to the time a student graduates, young people experience important social, emotional, and cognitive changes which shape their interests, needs, and aspirations. It is during this time that young people are actively exploring their identity, while also placing increasing importance on peer relationships.⁴¹ Understandably, several students noted a greater maturity and readiness to make these choices in their later years of high school.



"At first I thought certain stuff you didn't really need. Then later on when I was in my senior year I was thinking learning more would be better because you never know what can come at you."

-student, grade 12

39 Clandfield et al., 2014.

40 Hyland, 2006; Johnston & Wildy, 2016.

41 Government of Ontario, 2012.

"I am still... trying to figure out where I really want to go to be honest. I know it is kind of a daunting task so I am putting it off."

-student, grade 10

Some parents and students argued that more in-depth support could better prepare students to make informed decisions about their course levels. Guidance counsellors would appear to be the most appropriate source for this. However, it is unlikely that schools currently have the capacity to accommodate such efforts. According to province-wide data from People for Education, only 11% of schools say that they offer one-on-one counselling for course selection⁴² and only 25% of schools with grades 7 and 8 report have a guidance counsellor, the vast majority of whom are employed only part-time.⁴³

FINDING: FACTORS IN DECISION MAKING ARE COMPLEX

The students described numerous factors which affected the courses they chose in high school. Their past experiences, perceptions, values, and social location, among other circumstances, influenced these critical decisions.

Classroom Opportunities and Support

For some students, their experiences within the classroom played a significant role in determining the courses they took, often in divergent ways. For example, several students reported taking applied level courses because they enjoyed hands-on learning. This was also a common reason that some students enjoyed science – they appreciated conducting experiments and applying their knowledge. For other students, they took applied courses because they felt they would receive the individual support they needed. However, some students believed that if they had more support

⁴² Hamlin & Cameron, 2015.

⁴³ Hamlin, Hagen Cameron & Watkins, 2016.

they could succeed in academic courses. Parents also expressed a desire for their children to have more assistance within the classroom.

Interests and Abilities

For students, their interest in a subject seemed to be strongly related to their perceived ability in that subject. Students tended to express appreciation for subjects that they did well in. This also influenced the level at which a student would take a course: a few students would take their “strong subject” at the academic level and their “weak subject” at the applied level.

Future Aspirations

Almost all the students said they wanted to attend college and/or university. Some students, especially those who were new to Canada, identified college as a way to qualify for university. Some students knew exactly what they wanted to study in college

“I decided [to take applied] because some courses I needed to learn and get better in. The courses that I took that were academic were like my strong subjects.”

-student, grade 10

or university and chose their courses based on the prerequisites required for admissions.

Future career goals also affected the subjects students took. For example, some students reported taking certain subjects, like auto mechanics, because they wanted exposure to it before they pursued it as a career.

Yet, some students admitted that they did not consider or even realize the long-term impacts of these decisions when they were choosing their high school courses for the first time.

“Just knowing that I was so reckless and carefree [in grades 9 and 10] really bothers me. That’s why I try my best to stay as focused as possible.”

-student, grade 12

Meaning of Success

Almost every student described success as being about more than just grades. To them success was about learning, gaining new knowledge and skills, and having fun in the process. Students acknowledged that success was dependent on the individual; it is knowing you tried your hardest, which may look different for everyone. Contrary to this, a number of students did not take academic level courses, or moved down from academic to applied, because they didn't want to struggle or risk the possibility of failing a course.

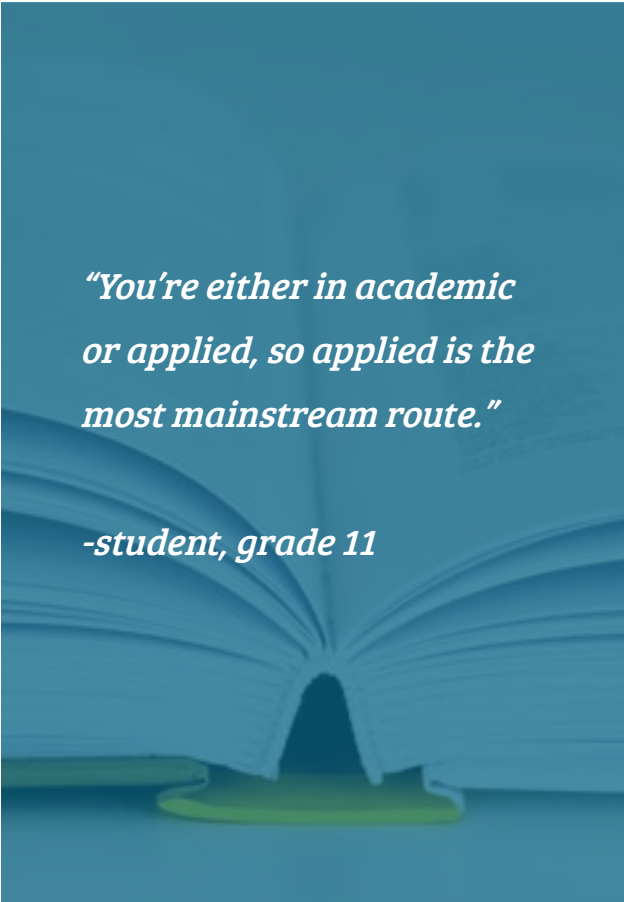
Parents associated success for their child as, firstly, graduating from high school. This was followed by getting a post-secondary education and finding full-time employment, while also doing something that they love.

Peers and Family

Very few students said that they consulted with their peers when deciding which courses to take. They recognized that every person is different and each needed to focus on choosing the courses that best suited their individual circumstance. While students enjoyed taking courses with their friends because they could help each other, it was not a deciding factor.

The amount of influence families had over these decisions varied considerably among the students. Some students' parents simply lent a listening ear or offered practical advice, others' parents pressured them towards certain careers, while other students learned from their siblings' experiences in high school.

Many parents were approached but could not be engaged for an interview for this project. The challenges encountered in this research project suggest that conventional outreach strategies may not be effective for engaging parents in this topic.



*"You're either in academic
or applied, so applied is the
most mainstream route."*

-student, grade 11

ANALYSIS: STUDENTS ACCEPT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BUT WANT TO BE SUPPORTED

Students' attitudes and approaches to course selection and school matters show they tend to take personal responsibility for their success in school and the decisions they make. They understand their achievement to be largely determined by how much effort they exert. This mindset indicates that students believe they play a role in shaping their current and future circumstances, rather than being the result of chance or forces external to themselves. However, they also expressed the desire to be supported through this process. Many intersecting and divergent factors affect student choice and parents and students alike valued individual assistance and guidance to assist them in navigating these factors. While some students opted for lower level courses which would reduce their risk of failure, if they had reliable support they may have chosen more advanced courses.

Studies suggests that parental expectations affect children's educational ambitions: students with parents who have high hopes for their educational future reported to have better attendance and positive attitudes towards school.⁴⁴ The parents we spoke to had positive expectations for their children that focused on long-term outcomes. These hopes were likely a productive influence on their children's education.

Parents are generally the best education advocate for their children. They know their children's strengths and challenges and can use that knowledge to help identify resources, supports, and opportunities that will support their children's academic success. More research needs to be done to fully understand the best approaches to engage parents and provide them with the knowledge and skills to support their children in the course selection process. Within the current system, parents may face barriers to providing this support, such as limited time, English language skills, or familiarity with the education system.

FINDING: A PATCHWORK OF INFORMATION

Students accessed information about course selection from a variety of sources and, perhaps as a result, have inconsistent understandings of the different course levels.

Several students from these schools described the applied pathway as being mainstream, suggesting that it is the most popular or default route.

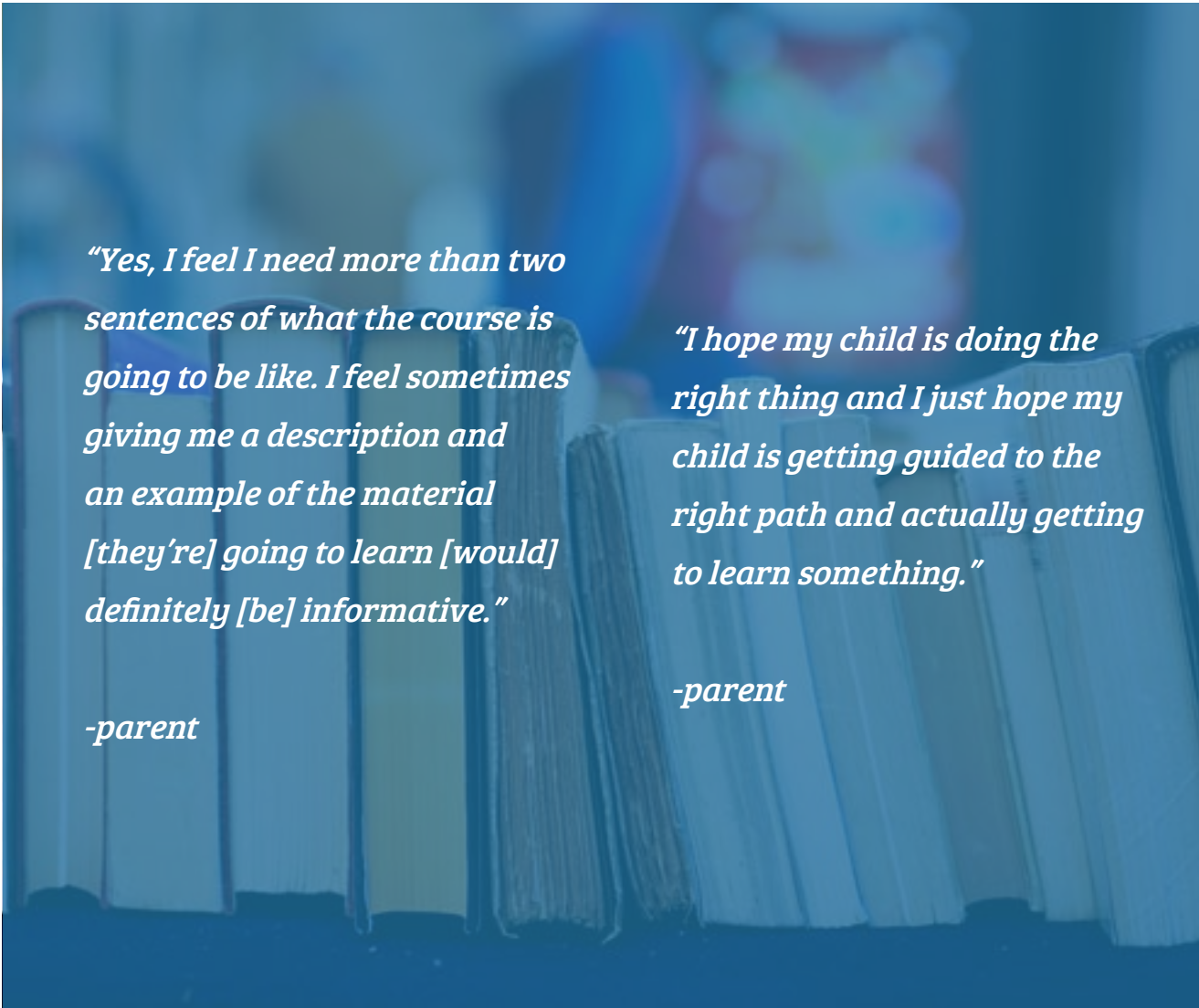
However, when students were asked to describe the difference between applied and academic level courses, there seemed to be no sure definition. Differences in pace, course content, workload, learning style, and post-secondary destination were most frequently cited. A few students could not describe the difference and claimed it was never explained to them. Several

⁴⁴ Lippman et, al., 2008 as cited in Child Trends: Data Bank, 2015.

students who had never taken academic level courses described their perception of academic courses as being boring, stressful, and/or too hard.

Most parents reported accessing information through their child, either through printed materials sent by the school or through conversations. If they needed more information,

most parents said they would go directly to a guidance counsellor or teacher. None of the parents mentioned accessing course-related information electronically, either through the official online portal for selecting courses (“myBlueprint”), the school’s website, nor by email.



“Yes, I feel I need more than two sentences of what the course is going to be like. I feel sometimes giving me a description and an example of the material [they’re] going to learn [would] definitely [be] informative.”

-parent

“I hope my child is doing the right thing and I just hope my child is getting guided to the right path and actually getting to learn something.”

-parent

Both students and parents expressed the need for more information and/or one-on-one support during the course selection process. While nearly every parent had seen the course selection sheet, several mentioned that course codes were confusing and not enough information was provided about the courses.

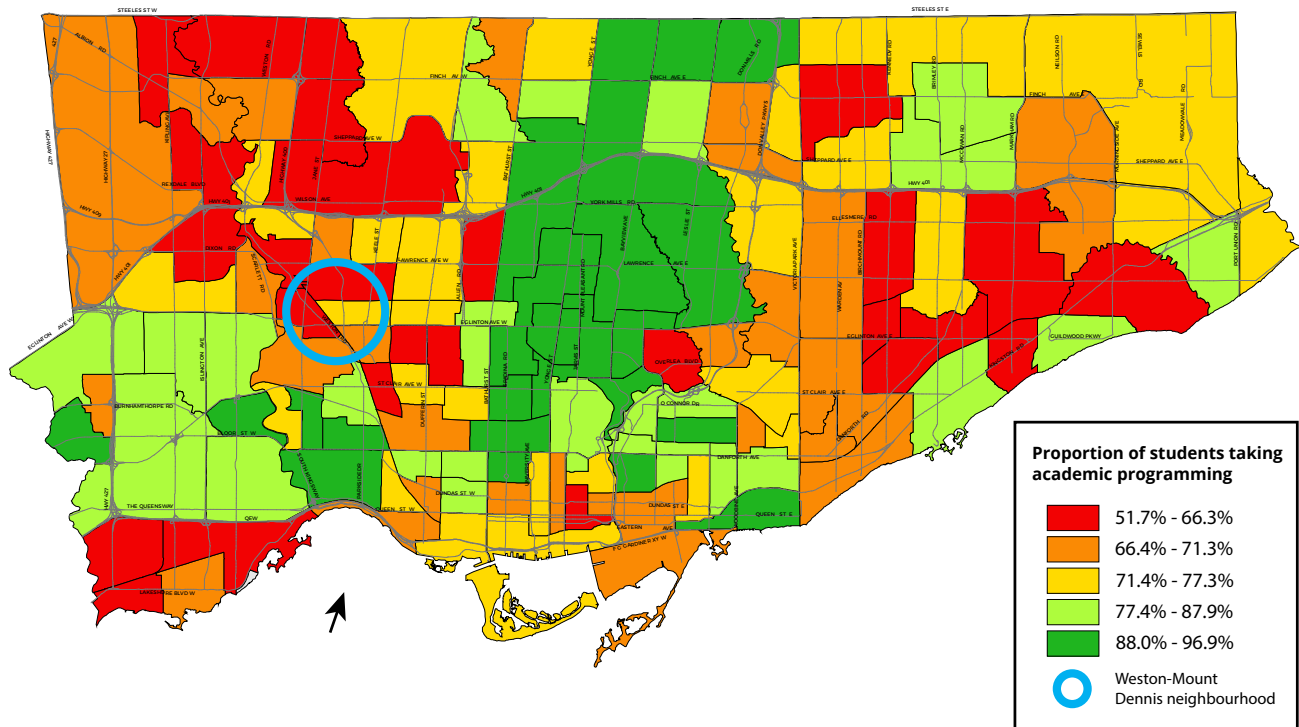
For some students, their guidance counsellor helped them make decisions based on their individual experiences, while other students would not even seek help from their guidance counsellor because they believed they didn't need it or they didn't think that person could be helpful. The counsellors were sometimes to be disconnected from the students.

ANALYSIS: DECISIONS ARE NOT ALWAYS INFORMED

Families' lack of information around course selection means that these decisions are sometimes being made without a full awareness of their repercussions.

Students in this neighbourhood understood applied to be the mainstream pathway at their school. As we know, students who are marginalized and from low-income families are more likely to be negatively affected by streaming practices. According to a 2012-13 analysis,

Fig 6 - Proportion of Grade 9 Students in the Academic Program of Study: Grade 9 Cohort of 2012-13



Brown, R. S., Tam, G., & Marmureanu, C. (2015). *Toronto District School Board maps representing demographics and achievement by geographic area*. (Research Report No. 14/15-11). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board Retrieved from <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/TDSB%20Maps%20Representing%20Demographics%20and%20Achievement%20by%20Geographic%20Area.pdf>

Weston-Mount Dennis and surrounding neighbourhoods have some of the lower proportions of students in the academic stream (see Fig. 6). This map shows that between 51.7-77.3% of students living in these neighbourhoods take the majority of their grade 9 courses at the academic level. This is compared to some neighbourhoods where as many as 87.9-96.9% of students take the majority of their courses at the academic level. These trends closely resemble patterns of income across neighbourhoods.

The high number of students taking applied courses appears to be leading some students to believe that applied is the standard route through high school, even though this track limits future options.

While the OSS:99 policy states that “academic and applied courses differ in the balance between essential concepts and additional material, and in the balance between theory and application”, this difference is not clearly or consistently understood among students or parents.⁴⁵ The fact that this very important information is not widely known among families demonstrates a need in the system.

While parents did have access to the course selection sheet, many felt there was not enough information and course codes were confusing. Presently, most TDSB students use an online portal (known as “myBlueprint”) to select their courses. Through this portal, students have access to a list of courses offered at their school as well

as descriptions of the courses. Since parents did not mention this portal and further described their lack of access to this level of information, they may face a technology barrier to acquiring this information. This is further reinforced by parents’ tendency to access information through their child or directly through school staff (as opposed to emails or school websites). This highlights the importance of considering the lived experiences of the community and ensuring information is available in multiple formats. Communication and engagement strategies must respond to and be reflective of the communities being served.

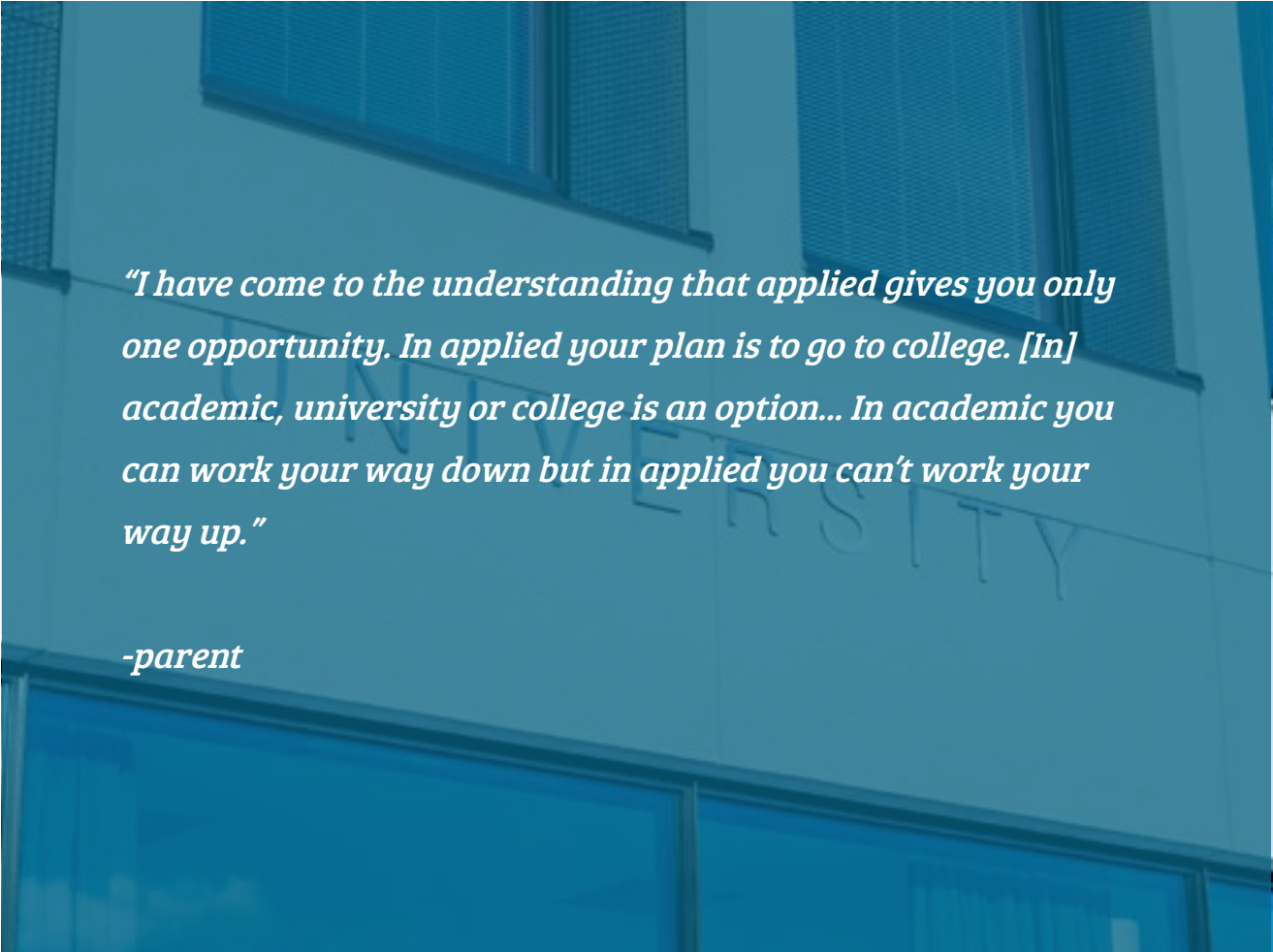
Inaccurate information may be the result of inconsistent patterns of access to information. As we learned, students have different perceptions of and interactions with guidance counsellors. This will inevitably impact the quality and type of information they receive. In turn, it will also impact the information parents receive, which predominantly comes from the child. The need for one-on-one support expressed by both parents and students reflects a desired change in the system to ensure that the course selection process can respond to and meet the needs of everyone’s individual circumstance.

⁴⁵ Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 14

FINDING: PLACEMENT REFLECTS PAST PERFORMANCE AND MAY RESTRICT FUTURE GROWTH

Most students believed placement in applied or academic level courses is tied to achievement levels. For this reason, it was generally assumed if a student put in enough effort and improved their grades, they could move up to academic from applied. However, for the few who actively explored making an upward transition,

administrative requirements prevented or deterred them. This could include taking a transfer course during the summer, at another school, or online, or repeating the course with students of a younger age. Additionally, some of the students mentioned that it is easier to transition from applied to academic early on in their high school career. They suggested that after grade 10, students are on a path that is difficult to change.



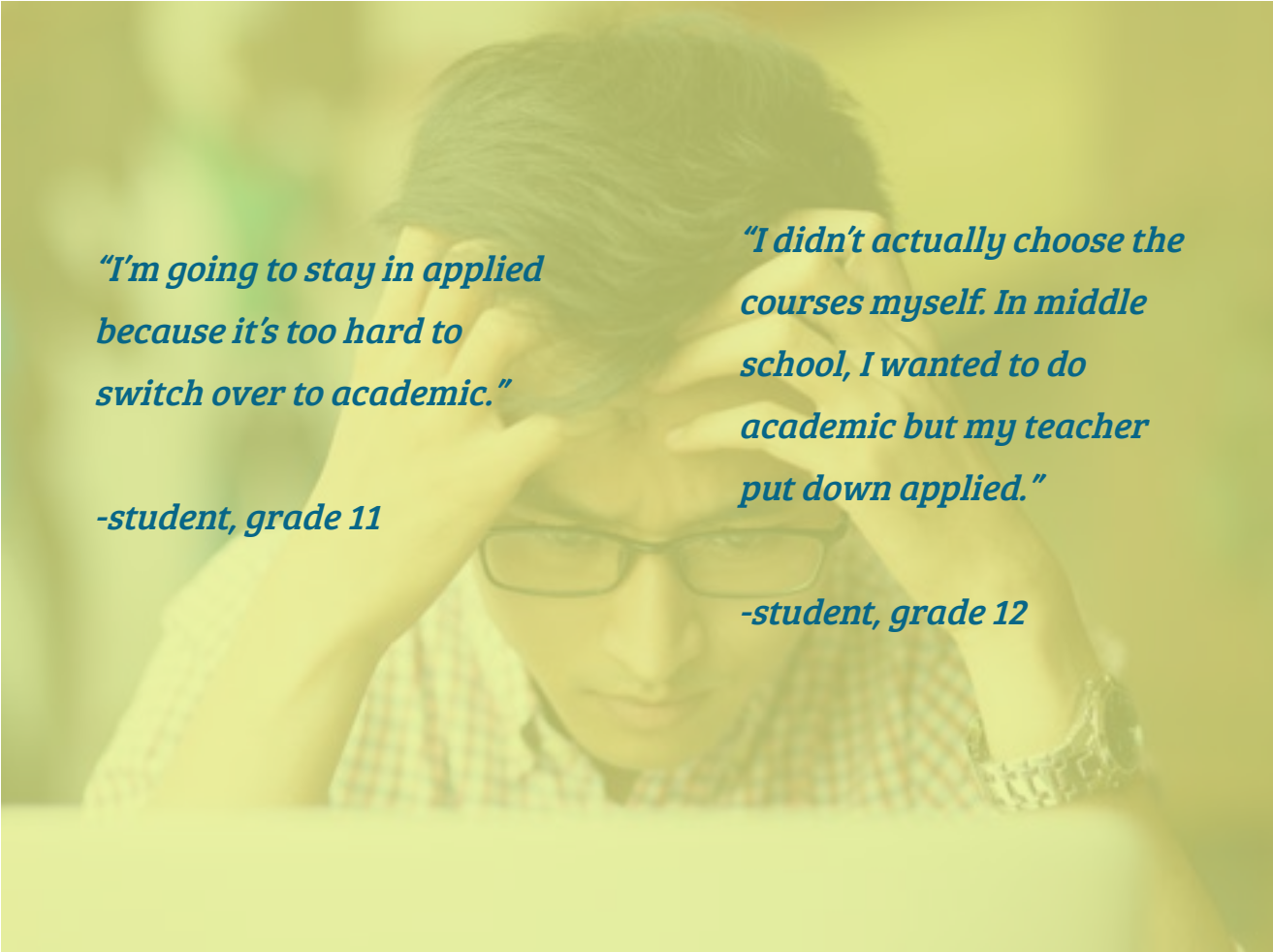
"I have come to the understanding that applied gives you only one opportunity. In applied your plan is to go to college. [In] academic, university or college is an option... In academic you can work your way down but in applied you can't work your way up."

-parent

On the other hand, students believed it was quite simple to move down from academic to applied. As one student commented, “you just tell your guidance counsellor [that] you can’t handle it.” Some students suggested that it should not be so easy.

A few students said that they wanted to take academic courses in grade 9 but received a different recommendation or were pressured to take applied courses by their guidance counsellor or teacher.

Both students and parents felt that the treatment of students varied between pathways, saying that teachers have higher expectations for students in the academic pathway and/or offer them more activities (ex. field trips). Similarly, students also felt there was differential treatment between the general student population and those in special programs, including the International Baccalaureate, Africentric, and R.U.S.H programs.



“I’m going to stay in applied because it’s too hard to switch over to academic.”

-student, grade 11

“I didn’t actually choose the courses myself. In middle school, I wanted to do academic but my teacher put down applied.”

-student, grade 12

ANALYSIS: POLICY IS NOT REALITY

Even though the Ministry of Education does not provide criteria for determining whether a student should take applied or academic level courses, qualitative evidence from our research suggests that this is largely determined by students' achievement levels and grades. Again, this is reiterated by provincial research from People for Education (2014) which found "the majority of principals say that students' academic performance is the most common factor taken into account in making recommendations".⁴⁶ While current achievement levels are important to consider, these decisions should include a holistic assessment which takes into account students' potential, interests, and future aspirations.

Regardless of the recommendation made by a teacher or guidance counsellor, course choices are ultimately up to the students and their parents. This means that students, with the support of their parents, can enrol in academic level courses despite receiving a different recommendation. Some of our conversations suggest that this, however, may not be common knowledge or may be difficult to enforce. This may be especially true in communities where families face marginalization and engagement barriers.

Ministry policy states that "students who are successful in any academic or applied Grade 9 course will have the opportunity to enter either the academic or applied course in the same subject in Grade 10".⁴⁷ The policy later adds that under these circumstances the "student will be strongly encouraged to successfully complete additional course work of up to 30 hours in summer school or in a program outside the regular school hours or during the school day".⁴⁸ This means that students are usually required to take a transfer course. Very few schools offer transfer courses during the regular school day, so students may have to repeat the subject, or take an online or summer school course.⁴⁹ This process is even more challenging as students progress through high school and transfer credits are required for all changes.

While students and parents are advised that it is possible to switch from applied to academic, the administrative burden of upgrading credits is a meaningful obstacle and prevents some students from pursuing their desired path. Since our findings indicate that the current system seems unable to provide enough flexibility to ensure all students can move between pathways, families need clear and accurate information that describes the different pathways and what is required to change pathways.

⁴⁶ P.4

⁴⁷ Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 14, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 28.

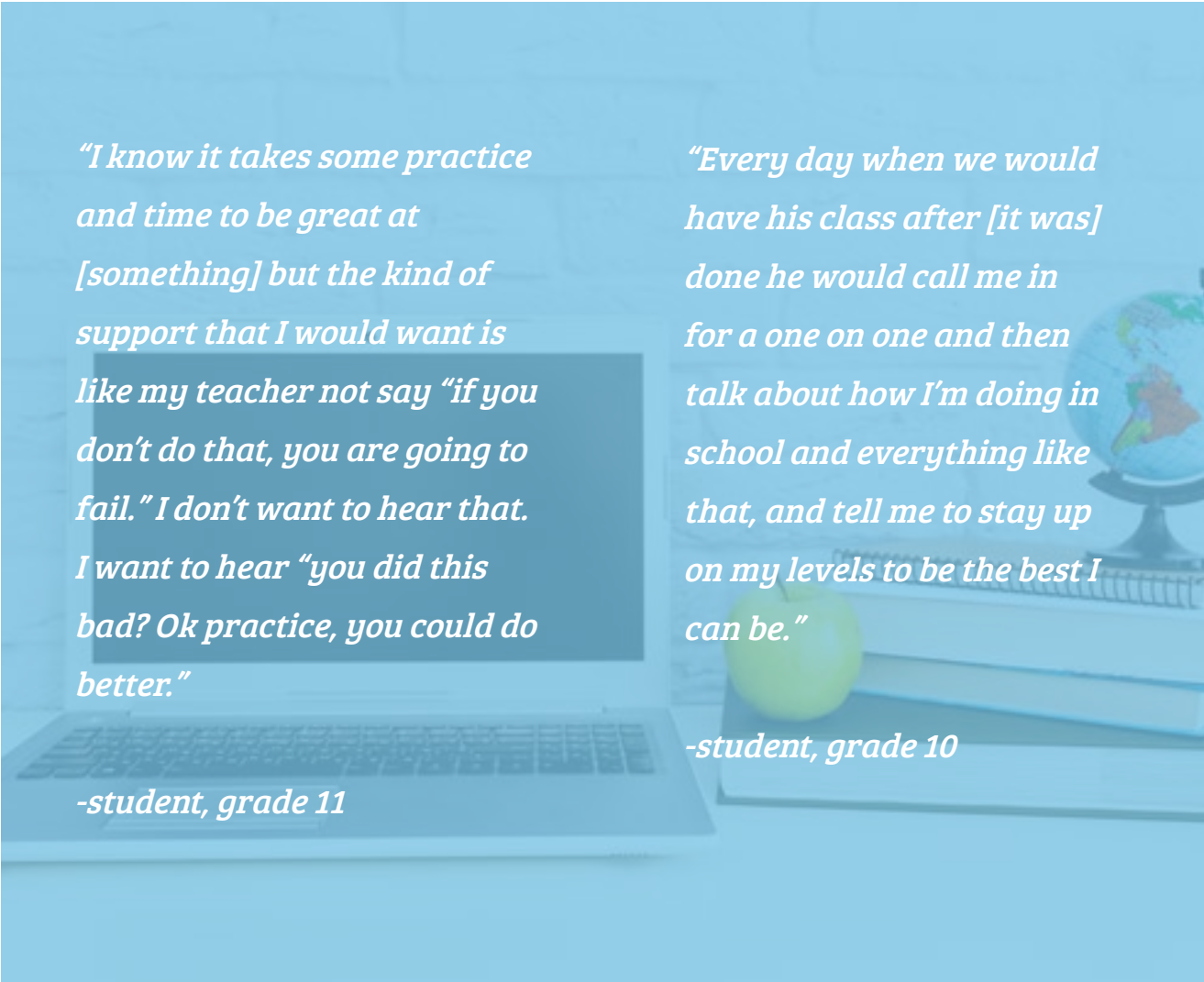
⁴⁹ People for Education, n.d.

Conversely, the ease with which students can move to a lower pathway is an area of concern. Both transitions can have different yet substantial impacts on the current and future success of a student and therefore should be given ample attention and consideration.

Although the current structure for secondary school courses was developed to allow students flexibility and “select an appropriate combination of academic, applied, and open courses,”⁵⁰ students tend to take the majority of their courses at the same level. More so, patterns of enrollment closely resemble the old system of advanced (academic), general (applied) and basic (essentials).⁵¹ Despite policy stating otherwise, students continue to be grouped among structured pathways which are difficult to alter and which significantly disadvantages low-income and marginalized students.

⁵⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 19.

⁵¹ Brown, Newton, Tam & Parekh, 2015.



“I know it takes some practice and time to be great at [something] but the kind of support that I would want is like my teacher not say “if you don’t do that, you are going to fail.” I don’t want to hear that. I want to hear “you did this bad? Ok practice, you could do better.”

-student, grade 11

“Every day when we would have his class after [it was] done he would call me in for a one on one and then talk about how I’m doing in school and everything like that, and tell me to stay up on my levels to be the best I can be.”

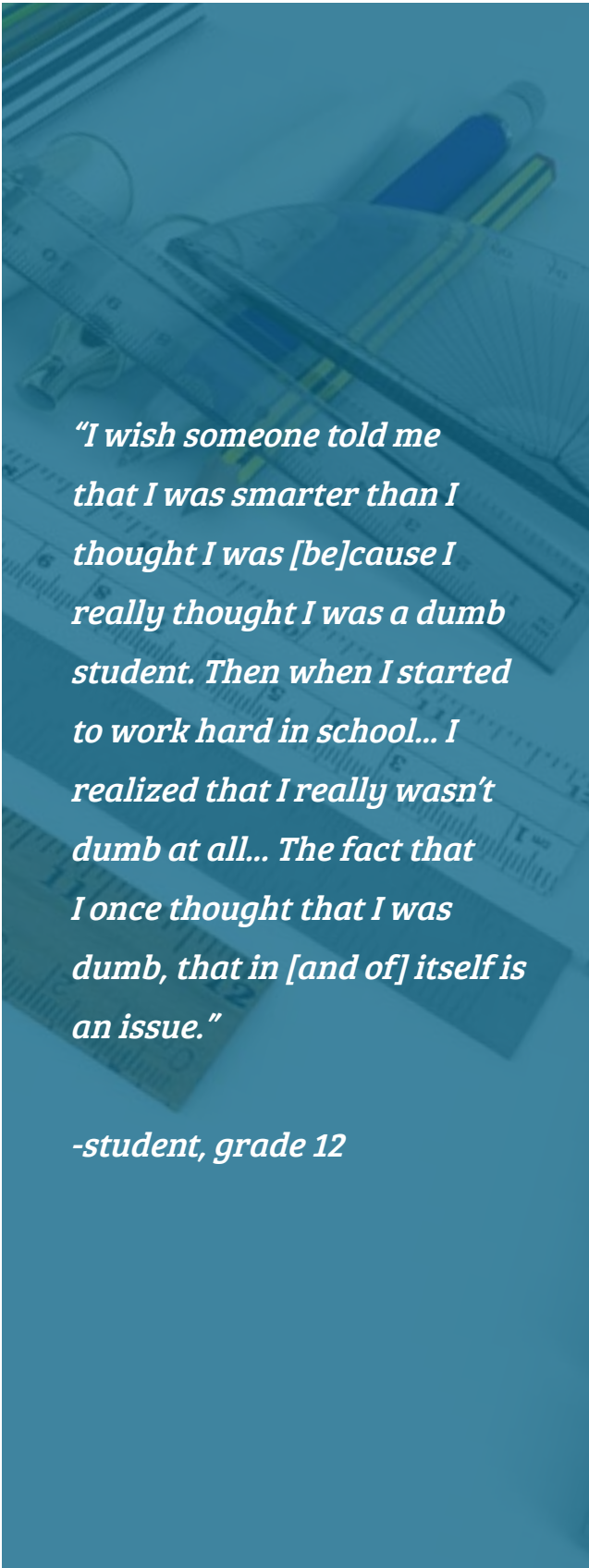
-student, grade 10

FINDING: ENCOURAGEMENT AND ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Most students spoke about particular teachers at their school as playing an important role in their success. When students were asked about what makes a teacher stand out, they talked about their personal relationship which was built on mutual respect. Their teachers taught valuable life lessons and took the time to understand the student's personal strengths and weaknesses. Notably, these teachers often altered their teaching style to support the student and would offer one-on-one instruction and assistance.

When students sought the advice of a teacher to help their course selection, it was almost always informal in nature and involved a teacher they had a personal relationship with. Students also spoke positively about the teachers that pushed them to achieve their potential and supported them in ways that students felt were above and beyond their job description.

Beyond the classroom, several students talked about the importance of taking trips to post-secondary institutions, including Humber College, Ryerson University, and Harvard University. These trips shaped their future ambitions and made post-secondary education seem within reach.



"I wish someone told me that I was smarter than I thought I was [be]cause I really thought I was a dumb student. Then when I started to work hard in school... I realized that I really wasn't dumb at all... The fact that I once thought that I was dumb, that in [and of] itself is an issue."

-student, grade 12

ANALYSIS: PROVEN BEST PRACTICES NEED TO BE SYSTEMATIZED

Rather than speaking to a parent or guidance counsellor, many students spoke to a trusted teacher about their course selection. While teachers play important roles in supporting, fostering, and guiding young people, students suggested their role in course selection is informal and dependent on the personal relationship between the two. Consequently, this may not be a reliable tool for ensuring effective course selection across the system unless teachers are supported, trained, and allocated time specifically for this purpose.

Our conversations with students reflect other research that shows teacher expectations play a critical role in students' achievement.⁵² Croninger & Lee (2001) found students experiencing high levels of motivation, trust, support, and expectations from teachers experience higher self-esteem and are more likely to succeed in school. Similarly, the students we interviewed appreciated teachers who developed personal relationships with them and pushed them to do their best. Given the appropriate amount of reassurance and effort-based praise students can overcome barriers that sometimes prevent them from achieving their potential.

Some education reformers and advocates have been adopting these practices through a "growth mindset" framework focused on the ability of young people to improve on past performance and increase their abilities given support and effort.⁵³

As we learned, some students were disinclined to seek the help of a guidance counsellor (see page 24). It can be reasonably expected that not every student will take it upon themselves to seek the advice of a guidance counsellor. For this reason, more effort needs to be made to reach out to and engage every student. Formal processes should be used to systematize relationships between students and the guidance department. Whenever possible families should also be included in this process. Similarly, initiatives such as trips to post-secondary institutions should continue to be consistently offered in communities where fewer students apply for and attend post-secondary education.

⁵² Segedin, 2012; Croninger & Lee, 2001.

⁵³ San Vicente, Sultana & Seck, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Despite provincial claims that streaming has been abolished, quantitative data from the TDSB demonstrates that students are organized into structured pathways which significantly impact their access to post-secondary and career opportunities. This is especially detrimental to low-income and marginalized students who are over-represented in lower level courses.

Students are also pressed to make key life decisions too early in their academic careers. Without the maturity and support to fully grasp the weight of these decisions, these students are unknowingly following a path which inhibits them from reaching their full potential. The current system presents a number of hurdles that makes revising these decisions and changing one's pathway difficult. This all happens within an education system which insists on being "focused on ensuring that no child or youth will have anything in the way to stop them from reaching their potential".⁵⁴

So long as this structure is in place, families need access to information and support in a systematized and reliable manner. As demonstrated by qualitative data from this project, a patchwork of information leaves some students making decisions in dark.

"I believe the education system is influenced by society and society is influenced by the government.... Like we're black, we should be taking these low worker jobs and these little fast food jobs and these little cheap paying jobs, and then the white man should be like the big business man with the big house and the big car, the beautiful wife and like you know, they're just setting us up for that."

-student, grade 11

⁵⁴ Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, para. 3.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While this research is based on data rooted in the Toronto District School Board, pathways through high school are provincially mandated and learnings from this project may be applied by local school boards as well as the Ministry of Education.

1. Make de-streaming policies currently in place more effective. Initiate a review the practice of streaming and develop a plan to alter the process to address the issues identified in this report. This should specifically include delaying any selection of education pathways as late as possible.
2. Facilitate and resource de-streaming efforts, including expanding successful pilots that have raised student achievement levels and increased success for students from marginalized and low-income communities.
3. Provide more flexibility and support for students who want to move up streams, including more accessible remedial education opportunities.
4. Increase transparency around pathways, what is required to move between pathways, and the future options available with each pathway.
5. Increase exposure of students (regardless of pathway) to guidance counsellors, career planning resources, enrichment activities, and a wide range of post-secondary opportunities using systematized and responsive approaches.
6. Increase efforts to raise awareness about the importance of course selection and to inform parents about available choices, targeting community groups over-represented in the lower streams.
7. Investigate more effective strategies for engaging parents in the course selection process.
8. Through professional development and other initiatives, support teachers in engaging students in supportive, trusting relationships, growth oriented guidance and expectations that encourage development and success.
9. Provide effective equity-specific training for school staff, including administrators, guidance counsellors and teachers, which includes awareness of barriers to growth and success for students in specific populations.

REFERENCES

- Brown, R. S., Tam, G., & Marmureanu, C. (2015). Toronto District School Board maps representing demographics and achievement by geographic area. (Research Report No. 14/15-11). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board Retrieved from <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/TDSB%20Maps%20Representing%20Demographics%20and%20Achievement%20by%20Geographic%20Area.pdf>
- Brown, R.S., Newton, L., Tam, G., & Parekh, G. (2015). The trajectories of grade 9 mathematics achievement 2008-2013. (Research Report No. 15/16-05). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board. Retrieved from <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/TheTrajectoriesofGrade9MathematicsAchievement2008-2013.pdf>
- Brunello, G., & Checchi, D. (2007). Does school tracking affect equality of opportunity? New international evidence. *Economic Policy*, 22(52), 781-861. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0327.2007.00189.x
- Burris, C. C., & Welner, K. G. (2005). Closing the achievement gap by detracking. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(8), 594-598. doi:10.1177/003172170508600808
- Child Trends: Data Bank. (2015, October). Parental expectations for their children's academic attainment - child trends. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/parental-expectations-for-their-childrens-academic-attainment/>
- City of Toronto. (2014a). 2011 neighbourhood demographic estimates: 113. Weston. Retrieved from https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Social%20Development,%20Finance%20&%20Administration/Shared%20Content/Demographics/PDFs/NIA_2014_Profiles/113%20Weston.pdf
- City of Toronto. (2014b). 2011 neighbourhood demographic estimates: 115. Mount Dennis. Retrieved from https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Social%20Development,%20Finance%20&%20Administration/Shared%20Content/Demographics/PDFs/NIA_2014_Profiles/115%20Mount%20Dennis.pdf
- Clandfield, D., Curtis, B., Galabuzi, G., San Vicente, A., Livingstone, D.W., & Smaller, H. (2014). Re-stacking the deck: Streaming by class, race and gender in Ontario schools. D. Clandfield & G. Martell (Eds.) Toronto, ON: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Croninger, R. G., & Lee, V. E. (2001). Social capital and dropping out of high school: Benefits to at-risk students of teachers' support and guidance. *The Teachers College Record*, 103(4), 548-581. doi:10.1111/0161-4681.00127
- Curtis, B., Livingstone, D.W., & Smaller, H. (1992). Stacking the deck: the streaming of working class kids in Ontario schools. Toronto, ON: Our school-Our Selves Education Foundation.
- Ercole, J. (2009). Labeling in the Classroom: Teacher Expectations and their Effects on Students' Academic Potential.
- Gamoran, A. (1992). The variable effects of high school tracking. *American Sociological Review*, 57(6), 812-828.
- Gordon, A. (2017, March 1). Students shortchanged by gaps in careers strategy: Report. Toronto Star. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2017/03/01/students-shortchanged-by-gaps-in-careers-strategy-report.html>
- Government of Ontario. (2012). Stepping stones: A resource guide on youth development. Retrieved from <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/youthopportunities/steppingstones/SteppingStones.pdf>
- Hallinan, M. T. (1994). School differences in tracking effects on achievement. *Social Forces*, 72(3), 799-820. doi:10.2307/2579781
- Hamlin, D. & Cameron, D. (2015). Applied or Academic: High Impact Decisions for Ontario Students. Toronto, ON: People for Education. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/People-for-Education-Applied-or-Academic-Report-2015.pdf>
- Hamlin, D., Hagen Cameron, D. & Watkins, E. (2016). Ontario's guidance counsellors: Spread thinly in an environment of growing expectations. Toronto, ON: People for Education. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/People-for-Education-Applied-or-Academic-Report-2015.pdf>
- Hyland, N. E. (2006). Detracking in the social studies: A path to a more democratic education? *Theory into Practice*, 45(1), 64-71. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4501_9
- Johnston, O., & Wildy, H. (2016). The effects of streaming in the secondary school on learning outcomes for Australian students – A review of the international literature. *Australian Journal of Education*, 60(1), 42-59. doi: 10.1177/0004944115626522
- Lippman, L., Guzman, L., Dombrowski Keith, J., Kinukawa, A. Schwalb, R., & Tice, P. (2008). Parent expectations and planning for college: Statistical analysis report (NCES 2008-079). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.
- Oakes, J., Wells, A. S., Jones, M., & Datnow, A. (1997). Detracking: The social construction of ability, cultural politics, and resistance to reform. *Teachers College Record*, 98(3).
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). Achieving excellence: Ensuring equity. Received from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/equity.html>

- Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. (1999). Ontario secondary schools, grades 9 to 12. Program and diploma requirements. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/oss/oss.pdf>
- Parekh, G. (2014). Social Citizenship and disability: Identity, belonging, and the structural organization of education. Toronto, ON: York University. Retrieved from https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10315/28217/Parekh_Gillian_G_2014_PhD.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y
- Parekh, G. (2013). Structured pathways: An exploration of programs of study, school-wide, and in-school programs as well as promotion and transference across secondary schools in the Toronto District School Board (No. 13/14, p. 03). Research report. Retrieved from <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/Ward11/docs/StructuredPathways.pdf>
- People for Education. (2014). Choosing courses for high school. Toronto, ON: People for Education. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/choosing-courses-for-high-school-2014.pdf>
- People for Education. (2013). Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2013. Toronto, ON: People for Education. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/annual-report-2013-WEB.pdf>
- People for Education. (n.d.). Tips for parents: High school courses and choices. Toronto, ON: People for Education. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/High-School-Courses-and-Choices.pdf>
- Peterson, K., & Hamlin, D. (2017). Career and life planning in schools: Multiple paths; multiple policies; multiple challenges. Toronto, ON: People for Education. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Career-and-life-planning-in-schools-2017.pdf>
- Rubin, B. C. (2006). Tracking and detracking: Debates, evidence, and best practices for a heterogeneous world. *Theory into Practice*, 45(1), 4-14. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4501_2
- Segedin, L. (2012). Listening to the student voice: Understanding the school-related factors that limit student success. *McGill Journal of Education*, 47(1), 93-107. doi:10.7202/1011668ar
- San Vicente, R., Sultana, F., & Seck, N. (2015). Sifting, sorting & selecting: A collaborative inquiry on alternatives to streaming in the TDSB. Final report, September 2015. On file with author.
- Sorhagen, N. S. (2013). Early teacher expectations disproportionately affect poor children's high school performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(2), 465-477. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/10.1037/a0031754>
- Toronto District School Board. (2016). 2017-2018 Choices: Secondary schools course selection & planning guide. Retrieved from <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/portals/0/HighSchool/docs/Choices201718online.pdf>
- Toronto District School Board. (2013). Operational procedure PR543 promotion, transfer and retention: grades 8 to 9. Retrieved from <http://www2.tdsb.on.ca/ppf/uploads/files/live/98/264.pdf>
- Wells, A. S., & Oakes, J. (1996). Potential pitfalls of systemic reform: Early lessons from research on detracking. *American Sociological Association*, 69 (Extra Issue: Special Issue on Sociology and Educational Policy: Bringing Scholarship and Practice Together), 135-143. doi: 10.2307/3108461
- Yu, R. & Singh, K. (2016). Teacher support, instructional practices, student motivation, and mathematics achievement in high school. *The Journal of Educational Research*. doi: 10.1080/00220671.2016.1204260
- Zeman, K. (2007). "A first look at provincial differences in educational pathways from high school to college and university." *Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-004-XIE. Education Matters*, 4(2): 1-15.

