Exploring Integration and Systems Change in a Model of Integrated Student Supports Implemented in Schools Serving Students with Complex Needs

by

Kirstyn Renee Morley

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Department of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta

Abstract

Support is growing for integrated student supports: initiatives that aim to promote success for students with complex needs by partnering with community agencies to provide school-based supports and services targeting academic and non-academic barriers to achievement. However, research on the implementation of these approaches is limited. Furthermore, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers increasingly recognize the limitations of discrete programs for addressing complex issues. Efforts are needed to further our understanding of how integrated student support initiatives can influence changes to systems on a broader scale. The purpose of this qualitative secondary analysis study was to explore the first-year implementation of a model of integrated student supports targeting barriers to students' learning and well-being in 5 schools serving students with complex needs in a Western Canadian city. Using thematic analysis with interview and focus group data collected during a community-based participatory evaluation project, the current study pursued two objectives: (1) to identify characteristics that can promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services, and (2) to explore initiative decision-makers' perspectives on influencing systems change. Findings highlight 2 broad themes and several nested sub-themes underlying integration. The first category of themes relates to the roles and relationships of the partners, consisting of leadership from administrators, agency staff availability and consistency, agency staff expectations, and teacher involvement. The second category of themes pertains to issues of power and autonomy; these include alignment with the school culture and compatibility of practice. This study demonstrates that scaling up complex, community-based initiatives can require systemic reform emphasizing innovation and flexibility, rather than replication. In addition, changes to policies and resource allocation across various levels of the school system and government were identified as crucial to initiative sustainability

and growth. Generating evidence of initiative impact was also identified as important for influencing these changes, and highlights the importance of considering the political context when working to influence systems change. These findings may be particularly relevant for academics, practitioners, and policy-makers interested in the opportunities and challenges related to integrating schools and community services and facilitating the adoption of these approaches on a broader scale through system-wide changes.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Kirstyn Morley. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Integration, Collaboration, and Systems Change in an Intersectoral Partnership Model”, No. 00078495, December 21, 2017.

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Introduction

According to the most recent census data, in 2015 approximately 17% of Canadian children under 18 years old lived in low-income households[1], totaling nearly 1.2 million children (Statistics Canada, 2017). While this represents a decrease from nearly 20% in 2012, it also means that virtually no progress was made since 1989, when approximately 16% of Canadian children lived in low-income households and the Canadian federal parliament unanimously approved a resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000 (Kolkman, Escoto, & Moore-Kilgannon, 2014). These statistics demonstrate the complexity of addressing poverty, an issue that interacts with several other sociocultural factors including race and ethnicity, family structure, and neighbourhood characteristics. Demonstrating the strong correlation between poverty and race and ethnicity, 38% of Indigenous children, 32% of immigrant children, and 22% of visible minority children in Canada live in low-income households (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016). For children who are not racialized, the child poverty rate falls to 13%. Furthermore, children living in lone-parent families are more than three times as likely to live in a low-income household than children in two-parent families, and children living in urban, inner-city communities are also overrepresented among those affected by poverty (Statistics Canada, 2017).

There is strong consensus that poverty is both an antecedent to and consequence of poor educational attainment. The detrimental effects of poverty on child development and well-being

[1] While Canada does not have an official poverty line, the After-Tax Low Income Measure, the international standard used to measure poverty and deprivation between countries, is increasingly being adopted as the de facto Canadian poverty line (Kolkman et al., 2014). When calculated using the After-Tax Low Income Measure, "families with after-tax incomes 50% or below the national after-tax median income, adjusted for family size, are considered to be living in low income" (Kolkman et al., 2014, p. 1).

are well established, with poverty related to an increased likelihood of social, emotional, and behavioural problems, and impaired cognitive functioning (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). Poverty is also related to specific educational outcomes including lower school achievement and increased risk of school dropout (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). There is a persistent and widening achievement gap between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Reardon, 2013). This achievement gap is intensified in areas where poverty is concentrated, such as urban, inner-city schools (Shankar-Brown, 2015). Furthermore, education is an important predictor of success in the labour force, and is closely related to the risk of experiencing poverty as an adult (Ratcliffe, 2015).

While policy makers often call for investments in education to help alleviate poverty and its deleterious effects, many initiatives fail to directly address the barriers experienced by children and families with complex needs (Berliner, 2006; Ladd, 2012). School reform efforts often fail to consider the contextual factors that influence children's well-being across the home, school, and community settings, and consequently fail to produce changes in children's well-being and success in school (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Epstein, 1987; Ladd, 2012). There is growing recognition that supporting children with complex needs requires collaborative partnerships between schools and community agencies that consider local context and directly respond to the correlates of poverty that impede children's academic success and healthy development (Ladd, 2012).

Integrated student supports, a category of models, approaches, and processes encompassing school-community partnerships and wraparound supports, present exciting opportunities for the education field (Anderson Moore et al., 2017). Broadly defined as "a school-based approach to promoting students' academic success by developing or securing and

coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement" (Anderson Moore & Emig, 2014, p.1), integrated student support models have been lauded for the potential to help alleviate the negative impacts of poverty on child development and disrupt intergenerational cycles of poverty. However, significant questions persist regarding how to develop and sustain effective partnerships between schools and community agencies in order to address barriers to learning and well-being (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Greenberg, 2004). The published literature has largely overlooked or failed to comprehensively address implementation components central to these approaches (Coldiron, Bruns, & Quick, 2017; McMahon, Ward, Kline Pruett, Davidson, & Griffith, 2000). The paucity of research on the factors that facilitate and impede the integration of school and community services has perhaps constrained more widespread implementation of these complex models (Sanders, 2001). Furthermore, without reflecting on and sharing learnings around implementation it is unlikely that any meaningful or sustainable change will be made to existing systems and policies for schools and community organizations.

Responding to the limitations in the existing literature, this qualitative secondary analysis study explored the first-year implementation of a model of integrated student supports targeting barriers to students' learning and well-being in 5 schools serving students with complex needs in a Western Canadian city. The initiative, *All in for Youth* (*AIFY*), is characterized by the provision of comprehensive wraparound services at the school sites through collaboration between schools and community agencies. The following literature review begins with a brief overview of the effects of poverty on children's learning and well-being, followed by a description of school-community partnerships and wraparound, the 2 complementary school reform approaches/processes for implementing integrated student supports that inform *AIFY*. The review

concludes with a discussion of how these community-based, multifaceted approaches have been evaluated, and what is currently known about their implementation and effects on children, youth, and families.

Literature Review

Effects of Poverty on Children's Learning and Well-being

Although the precise mechanisms by which poverty impacts children's development are complex and multifaceted, researchers have uncovered mediators, moderators, and correlates across multiple contexts and systems (Cappella, Frazier, Atkins, Schoenwald, & Glisson, 2008; Evans, 2004). As the disparities in child poverty rates described above illustrate, poverty is inextricably linked with many characteristics including race and ethnicity, family structure, and neighbourhood characteristics. While the unique contributions of these factors are difficult, if not impossible, to untangle, they interact in complex ways to create barriers to success in school and later life (Anderson Moore et al., 2014). Furthermore, a robust finding emerging from the field of developmental psychology is that, relative to exposure to a single risk factor, experiencing multiple risk factors in childhood (e.g., insecure attachment, parental divorce, racial prejudice, parental psychopathology, poor housing conditions) is related to poorer developmental outcomes (Evans, Li, & Sepanski Whipple, 2013; Sameroff, 2006). This finding, referred to as the cumulative risk hypothesis, suggests that children facing "constellations of risk rather than isolated instances of adverse circumstances" (Evans et al., 2013, p. 4), among which low-income children are disproportionately represented (Evans, 2004), may experience more severe adverse developmental consequences (Evans et al., 2013).

A child's home environment, including opportunities for learning, quality of parent-child interactions, and physical condition of the home, accounts for a considerable proportion of the

effects of income on child behavioural and cognitive development (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Guo & Mullan Harris, 2000). Parents affected by poverty often experience significant stress and may have less time, energy, and resources to dedicate to providing an enriching and nurturing home environment (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). These parents are less likely to be involved in their children's educations at home and at school than parents from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents experiencing poverty are also less likely to be physically and emotionally healthy; poor parental mental health is associated with impaired parent-child interactions, in addition to providing fewer learning experiences in the home (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). The prevalence of mental health issues may also contribute to higher rates of family dissolution, conflict, and violence among those living in poverty, which in turn may contribute to stress, mental health issues, and behavioural problems for children (Buckner, Beardslee, & Bassuk, 2004). In addition, school mobility due to economic and familial instability (e.g., job loss, family dissolution) can contribute to children falling behind on the school curriculum, and disrupts connections with teachers and peers that can serve as important sources of social support (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004).

Physical health problems related to living in poverty can also affect children's healthy development and school performance (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Case & Paxson, 2006). Children living in poverty are more likely than other children to have serious health problems, and receive less and lower-quality medical care (Case & Paxson, 2006). As a result of these health issues, they may be more likely to miss school days or be distracted at school (Rothstein, 2010). They are also more likely to be exposed to environmental toxins in their homes and neighbourhoods, which can contribute to cognitive deficits (Dilworth-Bart & Moore, 2006).

Low-income families generally have fewer choices of neighbourhoods and schools, and often reside in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods characterized by social disorganization (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Kohen, Brooks-Gunn, Leventhal, & Hertzman, 2002). These neighbourhoods are often distinguished by crime, gang activity, violence, unemployment, physical decay, poor housing conditions, limited transportation options, and lack of social cohesion. There may also be few resources located in or near these communities that promote healthy child development and learning, such as health care facilities and after-school programs.

Schools in economically disadvantaged communities often struggle with inadequate resources and materials, space deficiencies and overcrowding, and problems with infrastructure quality (Evans, 2004). Teachers in these schools may hold lower expectations for student learning (McKown & Weinstein, 2002), and low-income students are less likely to experience consistent, high-quality instruction across years of school (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, & Morrison, 2007). Furthermore, minority families are overrepresented among those affected by poverty, and minority children may experience discrimination, language barriers, and cultural disconnects in schools that further impede their academic success (Bryan, 2005).

Clearly, poverty is a complex issue that interacts with numerous other individual, familial, and neighbourhood level characteristics to influence children's developmental trajectories. To recognize this complexity, the following discussion will refer to students and families 'with complex needs'. This terminology is intended to capture the diverse characteristics and needs of those affected by poverty, who are also often minorities, lone parents/living in lone parent families, and living in neighbourhoods affected by social disorganization, among numerous other correlates of poverty.

Integrated Student Supports: Expanding Traditional Approaches to School Reform

The above discussion demonstrates that a range of social and economic factors related to students' family and community contexts contribute to persistent educational inequities (Dyson, 2011). However, the traditional education system is ill-equipped to support the diverse range of mental, physical, social-emotional, and behavioural challenges that students and families with complex needs experience. In schools serving high proportions of students with complex needs, teachers are often overburdened and do not have the capacity, knowledge, or skills to address the range of factors that influence students' abilities to learn (Sanders, 2001).

Prevailing approaches to school reform have often failed to address barriers to learning and well-being in comprehensive and multifaceted ways (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Schools have tended to emphasize changes to curriculum, instruction, and classroom management, despite the emerging body of evidence suggesting that non-educational factors are perhaps more important for the school success and well-being of students with complex needs (Bower, 2013). Furthermore, school reforms have largely overlooked the social structures of inequality that create disparities in educational outcomes among students within and between schools (A. Anderson, 2016).

As researchers, policy makers, and educators have come to understand that schools need to develop better strategies to address persistent, complex barriers to student learning and well-being, it has become clear that, alone, the education system does not have the capacity to meet this challenge (Sanders, 2001). If school reform is to benefit all students, improvements to instruction and classroom management must be complemented by the implementation of a continuum of integrated, comprehensive, and multifaceted school and community resources that address varying levels of student needs: from universal prevention programming (primary-level),

to early intervention (secondary), to targeted supports for students with severe and chronic problems (tertiary; Adelman, 1996; Adelman and Taylor, 2002). This awareness has given rise to a category of initiatives broadly referred to as integrated student supports (Anderson Moore et al., 2017). By developing community partnerships, integrating services within the school, and coordinating a seamless system of wraparound supports that remove academic and non-academic barriers to learning at the level of the student, school, family, or community, these initiatives aim to reduce disparities experienced by children and families with complex needs.

Although many authors use the terms school-community partnership and wraparound synonymously with integrated student supports (e.g., Anderson Moore et al., 2017), these terms represent distinct models, approaches, and processes with separate literature bases, typologies, and principles. Because the distinctions between terms are often poorly conceptualized, it is important to clarify and distinguish the meaning intended by the use of each term throughout this paper, as well as articulate the overlap and relationships between terms. Integrated student supports are defined above, and I use this label as a general, overarching category encompassing both school-community partnership approaches and the wraparound process. School-community partnerships describe the specific approaches through which schools and community agencies and organizations work together to support students and families (Stefanski, Valli, & Jacobson, 2016), while wraparound is a complementary process for delivering a comprehensive range of services that can be embedded within most school-community partnership models (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002). After a brief overview of the theoretical framework informing integrated student support models, the following sections expound on school-community partnerships and wraparound as distinct but interrelated strategies for providing integrated student supports.

Theoretical framework. The premise that social organizations are most effective when working in collaboration forms the foundation of Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. This theory posits that in an educational context, families, schools, and communities should develop shared goals for children's learning and development (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Influenced by an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979), the theory of overlapping spheres recognizes that home, school, and community represent three interacting contexts that exert influences on children through the conditions and relationships embedded within each setting (Epstein, 1987). Given the overlapping influence of each context, families, schools, and community agencies have a shared responsibility for children's education and development (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Accordingly, school reform initiatives should find ways to bring families, schools, and community agencies into partnership with one another.

The theory of overlapping spheres also situates the concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) within a broader theoretical context (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). As Warren (2005) summarizes, social capital describes "the set of resources that inhere in relationships between and among people" (p. 136). Social capital is "fundamentally about relationships" (Warren, 2005, p. 137), and connections to others who can facilitate one's access to resources is crucial to building social capital (Min, Anderson, & Chen, 2017). The theory of overlapping spheres suggests that social capital is accrued through interactions within and across the boundaries of school, home, and community (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Partnerships that enable students, families, school staff, and community service providers to interact in productive ways strengthen social capital, building resources across each context to better support students' learning and development. The belief that the integration of school and community services in communities

with complex needs can build social capital and support students' school success and overall well-being forms the underlying theory for integrated student support models (Min et al., 2017).

School-Community Partnerships

In general, school-community partnerships expand the traditional educational focus of the school to address barriers to learning through collaboration between families, community organizations, and schools (Stefanski et al., 2016). Many terms have been used to describe various school-community partnership approaches, including one-stop shopping, interagency collaboration, school-linked services, full-service schools, community schools, and full-service community schools (FSCSs; Adelman & Taylor, 1997a). While these terms have often been used interchangeably, they represent variations along a continuum of approaches. In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on understanding the nuances communicated by these varying terms. In 2016, Valli, Stefanski and Jacobson developed a typology of 4 approaches based on a review of school-community partnerships in the United States: (1) Family and interagency collaboration, (2) Full-service schools, (3) Full-service community schools, and (4) Community development. This typology will guide the following discussion, although I use the term school-linked services in the place of family and interagency collaboration to represent the first approach on the continuum. Innovators in the field of school-community partnerships have long used the term school-linked services (Adelman, 1996; Adelman & Taylor, 1997a), while family and interagency collaboration can refer more broadly to relationships between different agencies and organizations, and does not necessarily implicate schools. In addition, some authors (e.g., Franklin & Streeter, 1995) define collaboration as involving a greater degree of connection between schools and community agencies than is typical in schools employing a family and interagency collaboration approach as defined by Valli et al. (2016).

Three characteristics provide a framework for conceptualizing the differences between school-community partnership approaches: (1) degree of connection between schools and agencies; (2) comprehensiveness of supports; and (3) degree of parent and community engagement. Franklin and Streeter (1995) developed a continuum of 5 approaches for linking school and community agencies, with each approach representing greater levels of change to existing systems. From least change to greatest change, these categories are: (1) Informal relations, (2) Coordination, (3) Partnership, (4) Collaboration, and (5) Integration. While I generally use the terms partnership, collaboration, and integration in their colloquial sense throughout this paper, in the following discussion of school-community partnership approaches I make explicit those instances where I am discussing these terms in the sense of Franklin and Streeter's continuum for linking school and community agencies. In addition to differences in degree of connection between schools and agencies, school-community partnership approaches also differ in comprehensiveness of supports. While all school-community partnerships are built on the foundation of increasing students' and families' access to services, not all approaches provide a comprehensive range of services that address a variety of needs and span primary prevention, early-onset treatment, and intervention for chronic problems (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Finally, approaches differ in their emphasis on parent and community engagement.

School-linked services. School-linked services represent one of the earliest iterations of school-community partnerships (Adelman, 1996). School-linked services generally refer to community-owned services with connections to schools located on and off school grounds (Adelman & Taylor, 1997a). Typically, health and community service agencies relocate some of their staff or services to the school, so that some services are provided on-site (Normore & Blanco, 2006). When services are not school-based, agency staff liaisons work at schools to

coordinate access to services by making referrals or organizing and escorting students to appointments (Quinn & Dryfoos, 2009).

Born out of initiatives to restructure community health and community service organizations, school-linked services aim to decrease the fragmented way that services are often planned and implemented (Adelman & Taylor, 1997a). In many communities, the community services sector is characterized by several competing organizations (Greenberg, 2004). As a result, duplication of services is common, and children and families with needs that traverse various sectors (e.g., health, mental health, employment, housing, nutrition) are often served by multiple different agencies working in isolation from one another. By establishing connections with school sites, community organizations may be able to enhance access to services, reduce redundancy, improve case management, coordinate resources, and serve a greater number of individuals (Adelman, 1996; Adelman & Taylor, 1997a). Perhaps one of the most obvious benefits of this approach is the increased convenience for students and families (Grossman & Vang, 2009).

The school-linked services approach represents the most basic model of sustained school-community partnership, characterized by what Franklin and Streeter conceptualized as coordination of services (Franklin & Streeter, 1995; Stefanski et al., 2016). In the coordination approach, both schools and community agencies undergo minimal restructuring, as the coordination of services is mainly carried out in the community and links between agencies and schools remain relatively informal (Franklin & Streeter, 1995). School-linked services do not attempt to provide a comprehensive, multifaceted range of supports, and supports are not necessarily provided within school buildings. This approach is criticized for its failure to coordinate community resources with resources already existing within schools, and to foster

collaboration and co-ownership between communities and schools (Adelman & Taylor, 1997a). Furthermore, with little restructuring of school systems themselves, the resources available at schools characterized by a school-linked services approach are likely too limited to provide a comprehensive continuum of programs. While reducing fragmentation and redundancy in the community services sector and enhancing access to services may certainly enhance outcomes for students and families, focusing on services is merely one facet of a comprehensive approach for addressing barriers to learning (Taylor & Adelman, 2000). In addition, parent involvement or engagement is not a central focus of this model; rather, community agencies primarily view parents as clients to receive services (Stefanski et al., 2016).

Full-service schools. The full-service school approach moves beyond coordinating community resources with schools to delivering services predominantly at the school site (Stefanski et al., 2016; Valli et al., 2016). Full-service schools aim to integrate a comprehensive range of academic, health, and social services into the school to meet the needs of the whole child and their family, a process often described as wraparound. Services are reorganized into a continuum of intervention that range from primary prevention to intensive treatment for chronic problems (McMahon et al., 2000). The school often has extended hours (e.g., before/after school, weekend, and summer programming), and provides student and family support in literacy, mental health counselling, nutrition, and parent leadership and engagement (Bundy, 2005). Compared to school-linked services, parents play a greater role in the full-service school partnership approach (Stefanski et al., 2016). For example, parents are often included on decision-making teams with the school and agency staff, and are encouraged to increase their involvement at the schools through volunteering and participating in programs and activities.

Expanding the purpose of the school requires organizational change, so that the school is transformed into a different type of institution. According to Dryfoos (1994), the full-service school concept integrates educational reform and the reorganization of community services. Both school-owned programs and community resources are restructured and woven together so that community agencies become partners in the educational process, and schools become partners in delivering community services (Dryfoos, 1994, 1995). Franklin and Streeter (1995) describe the relationship between schools and community agencies where both are reformed as integration, and conceptualize this as the most transformative approach to linking schools and agencies. However, in practice true integration is difficult to realize (McMahon et al., 2000). While integration may be the ideal, many initiatives operating under the full-service schools approach, and the full-service community school and community development approaches that follow, represent less radical stages of Franklin and Streeter's (1995) continuum, such as collaboration. In collaboration, schools and community agencies begin to merge services, and each partner must give up some autonomy in order to pool resources and efforts towards a common goal. While the collaborative approach describes a shift beyond coordination of services, it does not represent the merging of the 2 systems into the single, integrated system of service-delivery that characterizes integration.

Full-service community schools. Full-service community schools (FSCSs) are similar to full-service schools in that both emphasize organizational change by integrating school and community resources to create seamless, comprehensive service delivery at the school site (Valli et al., 2016). However, FSCSs also advocate for a significant cultural shift at the school towards greater community engagement and involvement in decision-making. FSCSs are driven by the belief that students' learning and developmental needs are best met when families, community

members, schools, and community agencies partner to "to articulate the community's goals for its students, and to help design, implement and evaluate activities" (Blank, Melaville & Shah, 2003, p. 2).

The full-service community school approach transforms the school into a "neighbourhood hub" (Dryfoos, 2005, p. 7). Compared to the previously described school-community partnership approaches, FSCSs place greater emphasis on offering community-centered events and activities (Quinn & Dryfoos, 2009). However, improving student learning and development remain the primary focus. Engagement of community partners and residents in the schools is perceived as a way to contribute to a safe, supportive, and respectful school climate that supports students and provides them with helpful relationships and positive role models (Blank et al., 2003). The presence of caring adults in the schools fosters students' connections to the broader community, and also increases the community's support for the work of schools.

Furthermore, while school-linked services and full-service schools view parents largely as recipients of services and may include strategies to increase parental involvement at the schools, FSCSs are explicitly committed to fostering community and parental engagement (Stefanski et al., 2016; Valli et al., 2016). Traditional notions of parent involvement have been criticized for focusing on parents' deficits and needs, and perpetuating a hierarchical structure of power where parents' views are not valued by teachers and service providers (Ishimaru, 2014). The notion of parent engagement advocated by proponents of the FSCS approach suggests that parents should be viewed as equal partners and collaborators, who can contribute strengths and resources to help foster their children's success in schools (Valli et al., 2016).

Community development. The community development approach differs from full-service community school approach in that it is driven by recognition of the reciprocal, two-way relationship between schools and communities (Valli et al., 2016). School reform may be unable to address the social and economic barriers to students' success if the communities around them continue to be marked by violence, crime, poor housing conditions, and lack of transportation, among other factors (Warren, 2005). Conversely, community-building and development efforts focused on the neighbourhood level are unlikely to yield benefits that transfer to significant improvement in the development and learning of students in local schools. Accordingly, the community development model adjusts its scope and vision to include students, families, and the entire neighbourhoods and communities surrounding schools (Valli et al., 2016). Schools and community agencies integrate resources to promote community development and strengthen neighbourhood's abilities to address the complex problems existing within them (Blank et al., 2003; Sanders, 2016). Change is aspired for in both schools and communities, and parent and family involvement moves beyond service receipt, involvement, or engagement to empowerment (Valli et al., 2016). Schools work to intentionally establish collective ownership and decision-making with parents, and efforts are focused on helping parents, as well as students, develop leadership skills.

Wraparound

Like school-community partnerships, the wraparound process is a community-based approach to providing integrated services through the collaboration of multiple agencies (Eber et al., 2002). Perhaps as a result of these similarities, historically many authors have treated wraparound as a school-community partnership approach analogous to the 4 approaches reviewed above. However, wraparound is more accurately conceptualized as a process for

planning the delivery of services that can be embedded within a school-community partnership approach. Defined as “an approach to planning and implementing comprehensive child and family-centered services and supports” (Eber & Nelson, 1997, p. 387), wraparound aligns conceptually with full-service, full-service community school, and community development approaches that focus on providing a comprehensive range of supports and services.

The term “wraparound” dates back to the 1980’s, where it was used to describe the array of flexible, comprehensive, community-based services used to support children with mental health and related needs (Walker & Matarese, 2011). Wraparound was originally developed in the mental health and community services sectors for children and youth experiencing chronic and intensive emotional and behavioural needs, who would often receive services from multiple different agencies (e.g., mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare; Eber & Nelson, 1997; Walker & Matarese, 2011). Similar to the motivation behind school-community partnerships, wraparound is based on the idea that coordinating the various services needed by the child or family will reduce service fragmentation and duplication and contribute to better outcomes (Bruns, 2008b; Eber, Hyde, & Suter, 2010; Walker & Matarese, 2011). The wraparound process is guided by ten principles: (1) Family voice and choice; (2) Team based; (3) Natural supports; (4) Collaboration; (5) Community based; (6) Cultural competence; (7) Individualized; (8) Strengths based; (9) Unconditional support; (10) Outcome based (Bruns & Walker, 2008).

While wraparound originated in the community services sector, today the wraparound process is becoming increasingly common in schools, and is being used more generally to develop comprehensive, integrated plans for preventative and treatment purposes for children with a range of complex needs or who are involved in multiple systems (Eber & Nelson, 1997; Eber et al., 2002; Epstein et al., 2005). Schools are increasingly assuming responsibility for

providing community services for children and youth (Cappella et al., 2008; Farmer, Burns, Phillips, Angold, & Costello, 2003), and provide approximately 70-80% of mental health services (Burns et al., 1995). Integrating the wraparound process within schools thus has the potential to serve greater numbers of students than when wraparound is limited to community agencies (Eber & Nelson, 1997).

In addition, it is important that wraparound plans are comprehensive, which includes addressing activities and behaviours that occur during school time and coordinating community services with school services (Eber, 1996). It is important that teachers are represented on the wraparound team, as students spend a significant portion of time with teachers at school each day, and teachers can play an important role in identifying needs and supporting students across the school environment (Eber, 1996; Epstein et al., 2005). Furthermore, Nordness (2005) found greater evidence of interagency collaboration when wraparound was implemented in schools than when community agencies served as the entry point for services, a finding they attributed to greater access to trained professional staff, access to supportive services, and mandated service delivery mechanisms in schools (Eber, Nelson, & Miles, 1997). Consequently, families with complex needs who require a range of professional supports might benefit from the greater access afforded by a school-based approach.

However, building a sustainable environment for wraparound in schools is extremely challenging due to the need for significant interagency collaboration (Walker & Sanders, 2011). Wraparound represents a different approach to program structures, relationships with families, and needs of students with complex needs that diverge from how schools typically operate (Eber & Nelson, 1997). Rather than connecting students with available school supports and programs, the wraparound team aims to match students with the supports they actually need. Accordingly,

implementation of wraparound within schools requires changes to the ways that services are organized and coordinated within schools, and adhering to the principles of wraparound is difficult without a suitable environment (Bruns, 2008b). Sugai and colleagues proposed that building consistent structures for organizing interventions throughout school environments may enhance interventions to support students with complex needs (Sugai et al., 2000). School-community partnerships, particularly those characterized by a high degree of integration and comprehensiveness of supports, represent one way that schools can reform traditional organizational structures and foster environments conducive to the wraparound process.

Just as wraparound can benefit from being implemented within school-community partnerships, so too can school-community partnerships benefit from wraparound. Wraparound contributes a clearly articulated process to guide service planning and case management (Bartlett, 2015). By embedding wraparound within the context of a school employing a school-community partnership approach, collaborating agency and school staff, families, and students can benefit from an individualized approach to planning service allocation that respects family agency, builds on families' and students' strengths, and draws on central relationships in a students' life to serve as sources of natural support (Bruns & Walker, 2008). Reflecting the importance of an individualized, selective approach for choosing interventions for students, Heers, Ghysels, Groot, and Maassen van den Brink (2015) found that different groups of students benefited differentially from supports and activities delivered within a school implementing a school-community partnership approach. The absence of a general effect suggests that different types of supports are needed to support different students (Heers et al., 2015; Heers, Van Klaveren, Groot, & Maassen van den Brink, 2016). As part of a comprehensive, whole-school reform, school-community partnerships aim to support students

with various levels of needs. The wraparound process may be especially important as part of a school's tertiary-level supports for students with chronic, severe needs.

Integrated Student Supports in the Alberta Context

Given that the majority of published (and especially academic, peer-reviewed) literature pertaining to integrated student supports originates from an American context, it is difficult to characterize the Alberta context where this study was conducted. These efforts are further complicated by the ambiguous and inconsistent terminology used to refer to various integrated student support models, and the fact that these strategies are often initiated on a school-by-school basis by school or community leaders in response to local needs (Anderson Moore et al., 2017).

Overall, however, integrated student support models across the province of Alberta are in a state of development (Wosnack et al., 2010). In 2009-2010, a partnership was developed between Edmonton Public Schools, Alberta Education, and the University of Alberta to learn about how schools throughout the province of Alberta were implementing the wraparound approach and wraparound-style supports. This research resulted in the creation of a literature review (Prakash et al., 2010), province-wide survey on school officials' attitudes towards wraparound, investigation of how wraparound was being implemented in 13 sites across Alberta (Daniels et al., 2010), and a research summary with implications for policy and practice (Wosnack et al., 2010). These resources provide much of what is currently known about the state of integrated student supports in Alberta.

Alberta Education also used the information generated through the study to create resources to support the development of integrated student supports throughout the province. Alberta Education refers to the activities that bring together schools and community partners to address students' barriers to learning as "Collaborative Practices" – a term that can be considered

analogous to integrated student supports. The province endorses a collaborative approach to supporting students that echoes the rhetoric found in the literature on school-community partnerships, stating that "schools are most effective in addressing the needs of children, youth, and their families when school staff members and their community partners work collaboratively" (Alberta Education, 2011, p. 1). Alberta's approach to Collaborative Practices is based on 11 principles adapted from the principles of wraparound: (1) Collaboration; (2) Shared leadership; (3) Team based; (4) School-community linked; (5) Persistent; (6) Family voice and choice; (7) Culturally responsive; (8) Natural supports; (9) Individualized; (10) Strength based; (11) Data informed.

The implementation of integrated student supports (or Collaborative Practices) in Alberta reflects the diversity of approaches and terminology observed in the United States (Daniels et al., 2010; Edmonton Public Schools, 2017). Schools in Alberta serve as host sites for a range of interventions that represent varying degrees of connection between schools and community agencies and comprehensiveness of supports. This is likely a byproduct of the fact that these strategies often originate from localized, grassroots efforts to address crises in certain schools or communities, rather than as part of a system-wide initiative (Wosnack et al., 2010). However, interviews with school, health, and community leaders in Alberta reveal frustrations with these collaborative approaches. Initiatives are often poorly planned, under-resourced, costly, uncoordinated, and isolated from the larger system (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). Furthermore, although the province provides planning resources and guidelines to support schools and communities in developing integrated student support initiatives, funding from the province is limited. Provincial funding may be obtained through project-based grants, but these

are generally time-limited and can serve as a barrier to long-term planning and sustainability (Wosnack et al., 2010).

Evaluating Integrated Student Supports

Measuring outcomes. While school-community partnerships and wraparound represent distinct but complementary approaches for implementing integrated student supports, the evidence bases supporting each have much in common. Almost 30 years have passed since the popularization of these concepts, and in that time both have amassed a significant number of advocates (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). However, despite strong foundations in the literature on child and youth development, practitioner and family support, and recent advances in defining and conceptualizing the distinctions among these approaches (e.g., Valli et al., 2016), researchers generally regard the research base supporting their implementation and efficacy as inconclusive and emerging (Anderson Moore et al., 2014; Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Bruns, 2008b; Coldiron et al., 2017). This is contributed to by the practical difficulties inherent in evaluating flexible, community-based initiatives with multiple components that target wide-ranging, long-term outcomes in complex, open environments (Dyson, 2011).

Research on integrated student supports has been constrained by numerous practical challenges. As grassroots approaches that originated in communities from collaboration between community agencies and schools, these models do not have a history of systematic development and evaluation (Bruns, 2008b). School-community partnership and wraparound initiatives typically originate with community members (e.g., school and agency staff), who may not prioritize documenting processes and outcomes, and may not have the knowledge and skills to conduct rigorous research (Min et al., 2017). Academic researchers may be solicited to assist with program evaluation, but typically do not play a significant role in guiding the development

and implementation of the initiative. As a result, most demonstration projects have not been thoroughly evaluated, and the existing body of literature consists of a large number of research and evaluation reports that have not been published (Dryfoos, 2000, 2002; McMahon et al., 2000). Furthermore, researcher involvement only after the program has already begun limits the possible research designs that may be employed.

While numerous researchers cite the need for more methodologically rigorous outcome studies (e.g., Min et al., 2017; Valli et al., 2016), they tend to advocate for the use of experimental and quasi-experimental methods typically used in controlled trials (Coldiron et al., 2017; Dryfoos, 2000; McMahon et al., 2000). However, this methodology is often a poor match for research in school and community contexts. Randomized and longitudinal studies are expensive and time-consuming to conduct, which can be a significant challenge for community organizations that often have limited resources to dedicate to research and evaluation (J. A. Anderson, 2016; Dryfoos, 2000). It can be difficult or impossible to identify control groups, and because integrated student supports are typically implemented in vulnerable schools and involve children and families with complex needs, using a comparison group may be inappropriate for ethical reasons. For example, some authors argue that the use of a control group that does not directly benefit from the research is unethical in the context of community-based research approaches (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

In addition, students and parents may be unwilling or unable to participate in data collection activities (Dryfoos, 2000). Families with complex needs may be untrusting of researchers, and may experience significant time restraints and other barriers that limit their ability to participate in data collection (e.g., lack of child care or transportation). School and community agency staff serving complex communities with high needs may also struggle to find

the time to participate in data collection, and high rates of mobility among these families and staff may result in significant dropout over the course of research.

Furthermore, as systems-level initiatives focused on students and families with a wide range of complex needs, these approaches aim to address multiple target outcomes, and outcomes will be different for each participant (Bruns, 2008b). This makes it especially difficult to detect program impact, and important outcomes may be missed if researchers focus on a limited number of outcomes. For example, Valli et al. (2016) found that student academic achievement was the predominant focus across evaluations of all types of school-community partnership approaches. While this is not necessarily surprising, given that the central mission of schools is to facilitate learning and test scores are often readily available, broader outcomes around improving student and family health and well-being are often ignored. Similarly, although the theory underlying the full-service community school and community development approaches aims to impact the broader community, few studies of schools employing these approaches have collected data on outcomes specific to these goals.

Outcomes related to integrated student supports. Despite these challenges, several studies across multiple sites have found that integrated student supports contribute to a range of positive outcomes for children and families (Heers et al., 2016; Min et al., 2017; Valli et al., 2016). Furthermore, the majority of studies on integrated student supports have been conducted in real-world situations under dynamic, challenging conditions with children and youth with complex needs (Coldiron et al., 2017). Given that a significant body of literature indicates that programs found effective under ideal, controlled conditions often fail to yield benefits when implemented under real-world conditions, the evidence base for these approaches is fairly convincing, despite the methodological limitations.

Positive outcomes related to school-community partnerships span the domains of learning and achievement (e.g., attendance, high school graduation, literacy, mathematics), social behaviour and healthy development (e.g., physical health, emotional stress, disruptive behaviour, self-esteem), family functioning and parental involvement (e.g., family cohesion, parenting practices, parent leadership), and community development (e.g., community safety, pride, and engagement; Blank et al., 2003; Dryfoos, 2000, 2002; Grossman & Vang, 2009; Heers et al., 2015; Heers et al., 2016; Min et al., 2017; Valli et al., 2016). Despite stated theoretical differences in school-community partnership models, little difference is evident among their documented impacts, which may suggest challenges in implementing and evaluating these complex integrated approaches (Valli et al., 2016).

Investigation of the outcomes related to wraparound has focused more specifically on school functioning and emotional and behavioural outcomes. Suter and Bruns (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of outcome studies that compared youth receiving community-based wraparound services to control groups. They found positive effects for emotional and behavioural outcomes, reduced juvenile recidivism rates, and improved school functioning (e.g., improved grades and attendance). While relatively few studies have specifically investigated school-based wraparound programs (Coldiron et al., 2017) and, to my knowledge, no empirical studies utilizing control groups have yet been published, Eber, Osuch, and Redditt (1996) found that school-based application of the wraparound process impacted students' educational outcomes and served both a prevention and service role. School-based wraparound helped to prevent students with emotional and behavioural disorders from placement in a more intensive and restrictive educational setting, and also helped students to move to less restrictive educational settings (e.g., from special education programs to regular classrooms). Researchers have also begun to study

the integration of wraparound into multi-tiered, school-wide systems that offer primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of support. When wraparound was delivered in a school implementing Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports, a school-wide approach that utilizes evidence-based behavioural interventions, significant gains were found for students' educational, behavioural, social, and emotional functioning (Eber et al., 2010). However, limited research exists documenting the implementation of the wraparound process within the context of a school-community partnership (Bartlett, 2015).

Measuring implementation. Research on integrated student supports has also been constrained by a lack of attention to the implementation of processes before studying effects and outcomes (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Driven by a climate of accountability, funders tend to increasingly emphasize the importance of evidence of outcomes, tasking stakeholders with demonstrating that a program works before it is fully implemented (McMahon et al., 2000). Funding sources often fail to acknowledge that a program's efficacy cannot be demonstrated without several years of implementation (Adelman &Taylor, 1997b; Greenberg, 2004; Heers et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2000). Change in targeted outcomes is not immediate, and the changes most meaningful to program participants may represent long-term impacts (McMahon et al., 2000).

The evaluation field recognizes the need to expand beyond focusing primarily or solely on program outcomes to capture program processes and assess program implementation (Kalafat, Illback, & Sanders, 2007). Researchers investigating interagency collaboration have suggested that the clinical, efficacy-oriented perspective that asks whether these approaches 'work' (Foster, Stephens, Krivelyova, & Gamfi, 2007) ought to be replaced with a focus on investigating "for whom the program worked, under what conditions, and why" (J. A. Anderson, 2016, p. 16).

These questions are especially important for studying school-community partnerships and wraparound because they do not rely on standardized models (Coldiron et al., 2017; Heers et al., 2016). Initiatives implementing these approaches typically originate in response to the contextually specific and unique needs of communities (Blank et al., 2003; Bruns, 2008b), and while the approaches share common characteristics or guiding principles, the basic components are combined and implemented based on local context (Bruns, 2008b; Heers et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2000; Sanders, 2016). As illustrated by the discussion of the various approaches within school-community partnerships, programs vary in the types of services and supports offered, who provides the supports, how they are coordinated, and the purposes of the reform (Dyson, 2011). In addition, unlike most programs, school-community partnership and wraparound approaches have been employed in populations with varying characteristics (Bruns, 2008b). The complexity and diversity of communities means that what has worked in one situation, even if approaches or populations are similar, may not work in another. Measuring only outcomes ignores opportunities to learn from program implementation successes and challenges, which are essential for improving programs and applying learnings from one context to another (Bruns, 2008a).

Hernandez and Hodges (2003) argue that conceptualizing wraparound as a discrete intervention causally related to improving child-level outcomes is an inappropriate interpretation of the theory of change underlying the approach. Rather, wraparound and other integrated student supports approaches should be understood as variable, multi-faceted strategies for improving organizational relationships and service practices. When understood in this way, these approaches are best assessed not through individual child and family level outcomes, but by investigating organizational level outcomes, such as degree of collaboration and access to

services. Lack of conclusive findings regarding the impacts of school-community partnerships and wraparound on child and family indicators should thus not necessarily be construed as an absence of impact, but rather point to the need for greater understanding of the structures and processes involved in improving the lives of children and families. This represents a need to rethink the types of evidence that best reflect the process-oriented nature of school-community partnerships and wraparound (Prakash et al., 2010).

The hypothesized relationship between implementation and improved child and family outcomes is supported by researchers who have begun to explore fidelity to the core components of school-community partnerships and wraparound (Anderson Moore & Emig, 2014; Bruns, 2008b). Kalafat and colleagues found strong positive relationships between the level of program implementation of full-service schools, and social and academic outcomes achieved by participants (Kalafat et al., 2007). In the wraparound field, measuring fidelity has received considerable attention in recent years, with methods developed to assess adherence to the 10 wraparound principles, whether basic activities are occurring, and supports at the organizational and systems levels (Bruns, 2008a). Reflecting the findings by Kalafet et al. (2007) regarding school-community partnerships, research has shown that fidelity to the wraparound process reported by families and program staff helps predict child and family outcomes (Bruns, 2008a). Together, these findings suggest that while the specific processes through which school reform is implemented will vary across contexts, the level of implementation fidelity to the basic components of school-community partnerships and wraparound may be linked to program outcomes (Kalafet et al., 2007).

Furthermore, without investigating implementation a study might conclude that a program has been ineffective, when in reality the program was not adequately implemented

(Bruns, 2008a; Walker & Koroloff, 2007). Many programs struggle with implementation, and this concern is especially salient for complex community-based initiatives, given that they involve multiple components that can contribute to outcomes. For example, Foster et al. (2007) found that a community-based, collaborative initiative contributed to improvement in children's mental health outcomes at one site, but not another. However, limited understanding of the context of service delivery in the different communities constrained their interpretation of the findings, as the lack of findings may have been attributable to differences in service quality that were not measured. The limitation cited by Foster et al. (2007) is pervasive in the published literature on integrated student supports, which has largely overlooked or failed to comprehensively address implementation components (Bertram, Suter, Bruns, & O'Rourke, 2011). In a recent review of the literature on wraparound, Coldiron et al. (2017) found that more than 80% of empirical studies did not systematically document the approach used or fidelity to the principles of wraparound. The authors also noted a dearth of studies examining implementation supports, such as organizational context, organizational readiness, and administrative structures. As school-community partnerships and wraparound are not standardized approaches, it is thus difficult to ascertain whether the programs under investigation actually reflect the practices and principles of the models, and to establish relationships between the approach used and the outcomes measured. Twenty years ago, Adelman and Taylor (1997b) stated that good data about implementation was needed most in a climate of increased accountability. Today, that drive for accountability has only intensified, making this need even more pertinent.

Implementing integrated supports. The literature on integrated student supports often tends towards advocacy rather than critical analysis (Dyson, 2011), and one of the most

persistent oversimplifications that has emerged is that collaborative partnerships lead exclusively to positive outcomes (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Despite the pervasiveness of romanticized notions of collaboration, studies of program implementation reveal the numerous complexities and challenges inherent in developing partnerships between institutions and organizations spanning different sectors (Dyson, 2011). In actuality, few school-community partnerships have achieved high levels of integration and collaboration (Adelman & Taylor, 1997a; Dryfoos, 2002). Rather, parallel instructional and support components often emerge, with 2 separate administrative structures that do not represent the merging of systems into a single, integrated system of service delivery (McMahon et al., 2000).

Altering existing systems of operation within schools and community agencies requires redesigning mechanisms related to governance, coordination and integration of services, leadership, communication and information management, and planning and implementing organizational and program objectives (Adelman & Taylor, 1997a). Negotiating and reforming these mechanisms requires the development of new collaborative arrangements and roles for professionals working in schools and community organizations. In addition, priorities must be shifted, time must be reallocated to accommodate new responsibilities related to program coordination, development, and leadership, and power must be redistributed among stakeholders – none of which are simple tasks to accomplish in practice.

Schools and community agencies implementing integrated student supports face substantial obstacles. Attempts at model replication highlight how each school is shaped by local, provincial, and national policies, and that models must be adapted to local realities (Dryfoos, 2002; Gardner, 1992). Inadequate planning for the specific context of implementation, influenced by community history, needs, and the politics of agency relationships can

compromise program delivery (Gardner, 1992). Shifts in policies among school boards, funding agencies, and government bodies can also affect support and funding for initiatives (Dyson, 2011; McMahon et al., 2000).

Governance at the school site is another important issue related to successful implementation of integrated student supports (Dryfoos, 2002). Unstable or ineffective leadership, resource competition, limited and inflexible funding, inter-organizational territorialism, inadequate planning, lack of teacher participation, and staff turnover all represent challenges to the integration of schools and community agencies (Chen, Anderson, & Watkins, 2016; Dyson, 2011; Epstein, 1995; Gardner, 1992; McMahon et al., 2000; Sanders, 2001). Principals and other key gatekeepers at the school must buy-in to the program in order for it to be successful, and teachers need to believe that the presence of community agency staff will contribute to their ability to support students (Dryfoos, 2002). However, school and community agency staff often disagree about responsibility and decision-making (Chen et al., 2016; Dryfoos 1995), and may have different views on discipline and how to respond to student behaviours (Dryfoos, 2002). Educators often emerge from post-secondary institutions with little knowledge of behavioural psychology, while professionals working in community agencies typically have little exposure to the workings of a classroom (Dryfoos, 2005). Despite acceptance of the importance of collaboration and providing comprehensive services, it can be difficult for staff to adapt to new modes of operating that challenge entrenched assumptions and ways of acting (McMahon et al., 2000). In addition, while the various organizations involved in the partnership may claim to be organized around a common vision, schools and community organizations typically have different mandates, and different organizations may maintain disparate visions for the same project. School and community agency staff may also encounter practical issues related

to extended school hours, additional space requirements, information sharing, and confidentiality (Dryfoos, 2002). Communication is repeatedly emphasized as crucial to developing successful intersectoral partnerships (Dryfoos, 2002; Stefanski et al., 2016).

For nearly 20 years, researchers investigating integrated students supports have highlighted the need for studies to investigate the processes through which connections between schools and community agencies are developed and maintained (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Kalafat et al., 2007; McMahon et al., 2000; Sanders, 2001; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). However, studies continue to overlook implementation components (Bertram et al., 2011; Coldiron et al., 2017). More empirical research is needed to ensure quality implementation of initiatives (Min et al., 2017), particularly given the relationship between implementation and outcomes (Bruns, 2008a; Kalafet et al., 2007).

Systems Change

While gaps in the literature persist around implementing integrated student supports in individual schools, researchers and practitioners are also encountering increasingly complex issues as they begin to consider how to move from short-term change in isolated schools to long-term change at district levels (Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2002). The concept of systems change has captured the attention of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers seeking to address the root causes of the systemic issues affecting societies (Abercrombie, Harries, & Wharton, 2015). Systems change has been conceptualized as both a process and an outcome (Emshoff et al., 2007), and a systems change approach aims to promote lasting change by influencing the underlying structures and mechanisms that contribute to how systems operate (Sanders, 2014). This can entail fundamental changes in policies, processes, resources, power structures, relationships, values, and norms (Gopal & Kania, 2015) that ultimately contribute to a

more supportive context for initiative implementation and sustainability (Hopkins, Stringfield, Harris, Stoll, & Mackay, 2014; Sanders, 2014). Moving beyond demonstration sites to widespread implementation of integrated student supports requires policies and processes conducive to model "diffusion, replication, roll out, or scale-up" (Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2002, p. v).

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1977, 1979), Kozleski and Smith (2009) developed a framework for systems change at schools. Kozleski and Smith conceptualize systems change through the alignment of structures and processes at several nested levels, with students embedded at the centre of practitioners, schools, school boards/districts, state, and federal government. Although this framework was developed for an American context, the levels have analogous counterparts in the Canadian educational system. Because many integrated student support models originate through a decentralized approach led by local school or community leaders, including those in the Alberta context, the Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2002) suggests an approach to systems change that builds outwards from localities. In terms of Kozleski and Smith's framework, this entails focusing on mechanisms at the inner levels (e.g., students, practitioners, schools) and then developing mechanisms at higher levels to facilitate and enhance those efforts (Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2002). However, systems change processes can be incredibly complex, especially given the need to engage with and influence several overlapping levels of authority and power (Noell & Gansle, 2009).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative secondary analysis was to explore the first-year implementation of a model of integrated student supports targeting barriers to students' learning

and well-being in 5 schools serving students with complex needs in a Western Canadian city. Research questions include:

1) What characteristics promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services?
2) What are initiative decision-makers' perspectives on influencing systems change?

Methods

Context

This study took place in Edmonton, a medium-sized city in the province of Alberta, Canada. At 13.2%, the child poverty rate in Edmonton is slightly below the national average (Statistics Canada, 2017). However, the number of children living in Alberta has grown significantly since Canada's pledge to end child poverty was made in 1989, so that today almost 30,000 more Albertan children live in low-income families (Kolkman et al., 2014). Demographic trends among those affected by poverty in Edmonton mirror national trends. Edmonton's child poverty rate is slightly higher than the Alberta provincial average, reflecting higher rates of poverty in urban areas (Kolkman et al., 2014). Among Edmonton's large Indigenous community, the second largest urban Indigenous population in Canada, almost half (44%) of children live in poverty (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2017). Newcomer and lone-parent families are also overrepresented among those affected by poverty. As Edmonton's families become increasingly diverse on characteristics that correlate with poverty, with large increases in newcomer and refugee families, and an Indigenous population growing at twice the rate of overall population growth, communities are tasked with the challenge of supporting families with complex needs.

In 2017, the City of Edmonton launched a community-based strategy called *EndPoverty Edmonton* to coordinate innovative partnerships, advocate for policy change, and build the

capacity of community members to take action towards ending poverty. *All in for Youth* (*AIFY*) is a model of integrated students supports under the *EndPoverty Edmonton* umbrella that provides comprehensive wraparound services at school sites through collaboration between schools and community agencies. *All in for Youth* is a consolidation of 3 pre-existing programs with separate funding streams, governance structures, and reporting mechanisms, but overlapping goals around supporting the success and well-being of students and families with complex needs. Recognizing that supports and services were being delivered in a fragmented manner, a partnership comprised of representatives from 11 organizations and agencies including 2 local school boards, 3 community agencies, 1 municipal government body, 1 provincial government ministry, and 4 funding organizations (referred to throughout this document as the 'community partners' or the 'operational committee partners') developed the initiative to streamline services, reduce duplication of supports, and improve service delivery for students and families through greater integration between schools and community agencies.

During its 3-year demonstration period (2016-2019), *AIFY* is being implemented in 5 high-needs schools, ranging from elementary to high school, located in Edmonton's inner city. These schools were selected because they serve some of the most vulnerable communities in the city, disproportionately comprised of students and families with complex needs, and consistently rank among the bottom of Edmonton's schools in terms of educational outcomes. The students attending these schools are diverse, with high proportions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students, along with English-language learners and newcomers. Many children are part of lone-parent families, and family mobility is high.

At each of the 5 schools, interagency teams of community service workers were established to provide supports and services directly at the school sites, connecting families with

outside services if necessary. Agency staff include mentoring facilitators, out-of-school time coordinators, success coaches, family support workers, mental health therapists, and nutrition support staff who collaborate to support the range and intensity of needs experienced by students and families.

Qualitative Secondary Data Analysis

In qualitative research, secondary analysis is conceptualized as "a methodology for the study of…data derived from previous studies, such as field notes, observational records, and tapes and transcripts of interviews and focus groups" (Heaton, 2004, p. 6). It entails the "[(re)use] of data produced on a previous occasion to glean new social scientific and/or methodological understandings" (Irwin & Winterton, 2011, p. 2). Qualitative secondary analysis has been used in several ways, including exploring research questions distinct from the original study, investigating specific findings or components of the primary study in greater depth, investigating sub-sets of the original dataset, and applying a new conceptual lens to the original data (Heaton, 2008; Long-Sutehall, Sque, & Addington-Hall, 2010). In the current study, I undertook an in-depth analysis of concepts that emerged during the primary study, focusing specifically on a sub-set of the original dataset. Most qualitative secondary analyses are undertaken by a member of the evaluation team involved in collecting the primary data (Gladstone, Volpe, & Boydell, 2007), as was the case in the present study where I served as a research assistant for the original evaluation study.

Given the complexity of secondary analysis, Heaton (1998) recommends providing an outline of the original study and data collection procedures, along with a description of how methodological and ethical issues were addressed, and how the data for the secondary analysis was categorized and summarized. The following section describes the original evaluation study

(conducted from 2016-2017). which used a community-based participatory evaluation (CBPE) approach. This is followed by a discussion of the methodological and ethical issues involved in conducting a qualitative secondary analysis study, and the processes that were used to analyze the data for the current study.

Original CBPE Study

Community-based participatory approach. Min et al. (2017) suggest that the lack of empirical investigation of integrated student support initiatives has contributed to several challenges, including reluctance by communities to implement these models, a lack of empirical work to guide development, and reluctance to fund these approaches. Greenberg (2004) has proposed that a greater degree of collaboration between researchers and practitioners is needed in order for further advances in the development of these initiatives. Providing a unique opportunity to contribute to the empirical literature base concerning integrated student supports, the primary data used in this thesis originated from a collaborative evaluation study between community partners and academic researchers utilizing a community-based participatory approach.

While research and evaluation can be conceptualized in several ways (for example, as a dichotomy or as embedded within one another), one of the most common ways to distinguish between these terms is by their purposes (Rogers, 2014; Patton, 2008). Research is typically oriented towards testing theories or models and producing generalizable findings with implications for other contexts, while the purpose of evaluation is primarily to assess the effectiveness of a specific program or model (Rogers, 2014; Patton, 2008). Research aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in a certain field, while evaluation aims to contribute to key stakeholders' and evaluation users' abilities to make decisions to improve program effectiveness. Furthermore, research questions tend to originate from and build upon the

previous work of other researchers within a discipline. Evaluation questions generally originate from the needs and interests of stakeholders and evaluation users. Although certain approaches, such as community-based participatory research (CBPR), can blur the distinctions between research and evaluation, these characteristics provide a general framework for understanding the original CBPE study in relation to the current qualitative secondary analysis research study.

Illustrating the interdependence of research and evaluation, CBPE is rooted in CBPR (Suarez-Balcazar & Harper, 2012). CBPR emerged from a growing interest among professionals and academics to find new ways to study complex health and social problems, improve community outcomes, and reduce disparities in diverse contexts (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). Challenging traditional divides between the researcher and the researched, CBPR is a collaborative approach for addressing a topic of importance to the community by involving community partners in the research process. Researchers aim to balance scholarly contributions to the broad body of knowledge about addressing social problems with knowledge to support local community and social change efforts (Wallerstein, Duran, Oetzel, & Minkler, 2017). While CBPR has a long history of use, the application of a participatory approach to evaluation projects conducted with communities is relatively new (Suarez-Balcazar & Harper, 2012). Informed by the principles of CBPR, CBPE emphasizes shared decision-making and the active participation of stakeholders and evaluation users throughout the evaluation process (Suarez-Balcazar & Harper, 2012). In contrast with the dual purpose of CBPR, CBPE focuses primarily on co-creating knowledge to inform community decision-making (Aldrich, Silva, Marable, & Sandman, 2009).

Study design. The original CBPE study which provided the data for this thesis was a direct reflection of the needs of the community partners, who contacted evaluators at the

University of Alberta for assistance with developing and implementing an evaluation of a model of integrated supports in complex communities. Reflecting key principles of CBPR, including collaboration and creating knowledge for the mutual benefit of partners (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008), representatives from the organizations implementing *AIFY* contributed to all aspects of the project including design, data collection, interpretation, and communication of the evaluation framework, plan, and findings

The overall purpose of the evaluation study was to assess adherence to the *AIFY* initiative's 10 core practice principles: (1) strength-based; (2) collaborative practice; (3) relationship-based; (4) wraparound; (5) capacity building; (6) evidence-informed; (7) sense of belonging; (8) family-centric; (9) outcomes-based; and (10) systems change. The evaluation questions included: (1) What is the school-based AIFY initiative and model of service delivery?; (2) How are the core principles of the AIFY initiative upheld in Year 1 of implementation?; (3) What are the initial impacts of the initiative on children, youth, and families who are members of the school communities?; and (4) What are the initial impacts of the initiative on the stakeholder groups working to offer this collaborative model of service delivery to children, youth, and families (e.g., school staff, AIFY practitioner staff, operational committee partners)?

As overall approaches to research and evaluation, CBPR and CBPE can accommodate any type of research method, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys; there is no one design or method appropriate for all projects (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wallerstein et al., 2017). Methods are selected in collaboration with the community partners based on what is appropriate given the research questions and the specific community context (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). In the original CBPE study, the community partners and research team elected to use a mixed methods design. This involved integrating quantitative secondary data

collected by the community agencies and schools during their operations with qualitative data generated through interviews and focus groups conducted by the evaluation team with initiative stakeholders.

Semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups were conducted in order to generate rich, detailed descriptions of stakeholders' experiences with the development, implementation, and impacts of the *AIFY* initiative (Merriam, 2002). The community partners identified 9 stakeholder groups whose perspectives should be reflected in the qualitative data, comprising a spectrum of individuals involved in planning, delivering, and receiving the integrated supports: (1) students; (2) family members; (3) community members; (4) school staff; (5) school administrators; (6) agency staff; (7) agency leaders; (8) operational committee partners (the community partners themselves); and (9) steering committee partners.

The evaluation team consulted with the community partners to determine which data collection method, individual interview or focus group, would be most appropriate for each stakeholder group. Several characteristics were considered, including stakeholders' availability, the sensitivity of information that would be discussed, and the relationships between the individuals comprising each stakeholder group. The community partners provided the contact information for the school administrators, agency staff, agency leaders, and steering committee partners, who were contacted by the evaluation team to coordinate participation in data collection. Nearly all of the individuals from these stakeholder groups who were involved in *AIFY* participated in a focus group or interview. The evaluation team worked with the school administrators at each school to identify and recruit students, family members, community members, and school staff to participate in data collection. Participation by all stakeholder groups was voluntary, and parental consent and student assent was obtained for data collection

activities with students. A brief description of each stakeholder group follows, along with details on the methods of data collection:

- Students: Elementary to high school aged children and youth who receive the *AIFY* supports. Most students participated in individual interviews, although a couple participated in group interviews with siblings.
- Family members: Parents, legal guardians, and other caregivers of students who receive *AIFY* supports, and/or who receive supports themselves. The majority of family members participated in individual interviews. One focus group was held, consisting of parents and their child.
- Community members: Adult community members who are connected with or provide support for the school communities (e.g., volunteers, school resource officers, community nurses, FNMI consultants). Community members at most schools participated in individual interviews.
- School staff: Adults employed by and working in the schools, including teachers, educational assistants, and office staff. Focus groups were conducted with groups of school staff at 4 of the 5 schools. Due to challenges with coordinating a time to hold a focus group, individual interviews were conducted with school staff at one of the school sites. Individual interviews were also held with a few school staff at the other schools who were unable to attend the focus groups.
- School administrators: Principals and vice-principals working in the *AIFY* schools. A focus group was held to generate discussion among the school administrators from across the 5 schools, and at least one administrator from each school attended. One school administrator who could not attend was interviewed separately.

- Agency staff: Staff employed by the community agencies who work in the school buildings on a full-time basis. Roles include mentoring facilitators, out-of-school time coordinators, success coaches, family support workers, mental health therapists, and nutrition support staff. Focus groups were held with the inter-disciplinary agency staff teams at each of the 5 schools. However, a separate focus-group was held with the nutrition support staff given that they do not work as closely with the other agency staff. A couple of individual interviews were conducted with agency staff members who were unable to attend the focus groups.
- Agency leaders: Managers and supervisors employed by the partnering community agencies who oversee the AIFY agency staff at the 5 school sites. Differing from agency staff, however, agency leaders do not work in the school buildings on a full-time basis. Agency leaders participated in a single focus group together.
- Operational committee partners: Representatives from the 11 partner organizations and groups who engage in planning and decision-making around initiative operations. The operational committee partners worked closely with the evaluation team in a participatory manner to plan and implement the original evaluation study. Members of the operational committee participated in individual interviews.
- Steering committee partners: Representatives from the 11 partner organizations and groups who provide higher-level leadership and direction for the *AIFY* initiative. Steering committee partners participated in individual interviews.

Table 1

Original Dataset

Stakeholder Group	# Interviews	# Focus Groups	# Participants
Students	10	2	15
Family members	11	1	13
Community members	5	1	7
School staff	6	4	29
School administrators	2	1	9
Agency staff	2	6	27
Agency leaders	0	1	9
Operational committee	7	0	9
Steering committee	10	0	10
Totals	**53**	**16**	**128**

Note. The focus group indicated with family members included parents and a child.

Data was analyzed using content analysis by coding data and generating categories. Codes were aggregated across all 5 school sites to protect the anonymity of the respondents. While the evaluation team performed data coding and categorization, involving an iterative process of researcher triangulation and group reflection, initial findings were presented back to the community partners to validate our interpretations and assumptions. Findings were disseminated to the community partners and other stakeholder groups, such as the agency staff and school administrators, on an ongoing basis to provide evidence to help inform practice throughout the initiative's evolution.

Methodological Considerations in Qualitative Secondary Analysis

Justification of approach. While secondary data analysis is an established approach in quantitative research, the re-use of qualitative data is a relatively new and emerging practice (Heaton, 1998; Heaton, 2004; Irwin & Winterton, 2011). Researchers are beginning to recognize the merits of re-using qualitative data for research with hard-to-reach populations or for addressing rare phenomena and sensitive issues (Andrews, Higgins, Waring Andrews, & Lalor,

2012). Re-using qualitative data can also be a pragmatic choice, given that qualitative research is labour intensive for both researchers and participants, and typically generates a wealth of data that may not be fully explored in the primary study (Irwin & Winterton, 2011). The use of qualitative secondary analysis in this study was motivated by several of these considerations. The use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups in the original study produced a large body of rich and varied data capturing the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on a unique initiative (Heaton, 1998). By matching additional research questions posed by the community partners to underdeveloped themes I identified during primary data analysis and gaps in the academic literature, I developed a new study with the potential to benefit both the local and academic communities. Re-using the primary data also minimized additional burdens placed on community partners and participants around organizing and participating in data collection, an important consideration when working to maintain positive and respectful relationships with community members.

Data 'fit'. Data 'fit' refers to whether the primary data are compatible with secondary analysis, and depends upon the fit between the purpose of the analysis and the nature of the original data (Heaton, 1998). Heaton (2004) observed that fit is less likely to pose a problem when the purpose of a secondary analysis is to investigate issues arising from a previous analysis using the same dataset. Demonstrating congruence with the primary data and the CBPE approach used in the original study, the research questions for the current study were developed through the consideration and integration of gaps in the preexisting literature, my own prior engagement with the data during the original analysis, and the needs and interests of the community partners.

Sorting, a technique used by secondary researchers to shape the dataset and align it with the purpose of the secondary analysis, also contributed to data fit (Heaton, 2004). Rather than

using the transcripts derived from all 9 stakeholder groups who contributed qualitative data for the original study, I included only those groups who provided information pertinent to my research questions (Heaton, 1998; Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). This resulted in the exclusion of all the transcripts derived from 3 of the 9 stakeholder groups: students, family members, and community members. The transcripts analyzed in the current study derive from interviews and focus groups conducted with school staff, school administrators, agency staff, agency leaders, operational committee partners, and steering committee partners. The re-shaped dataset consisted of a total of 27 interviews and 12 focus groups conducted with 93 individuals. A breakdown by stakeholder group is provided in Table 2, and the questions that guided data collection with each stakeholder group are provided in Appendices A to F.

Table 2

Dataset used in Qualitative Secondary Analysis

Stakeholder Group	# Interviews	# Focus Groups	# Participants
School staff	6	4	29
School administrators	2	1	9
Agency staff	2	6	27
Agency leaders	0	1	9
Operational committee	7	0	9
Steering committee	10	0	10
Totals	**27**	**12**	**93**

Researcher reflexivity. Another practical and epistemological issue researchers using qualitative secondary analysis must reconcile is the relationship or distance of the secondary analyst to the data (Heaton, 1998). Epistemologically, the creation of data and knowledge within a qualitative research paradigm are often understood as inseparable from the historical, social, and political contexts in which the research processes take place (Irwin & Winterton, 2011). Many qualitative researchers contend that data is "subjectively constructed within a constellation

of multiple circumstances" (Irwin & Winterton, 2011, p. 6). Indeed, in alignment with these assumptions the current study is informed by ontological critical realism and epistemological contextualism (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While some researchers have argued that all research is contingent upon one's subjective understandings to some degree (suggesting that a relatively distant relationship to the primary data need not preclude the possibility of secondary analysis on epistemological terms) researchers must also consider the practical limitations this distance can engender (Heaton, 1998; Heaton, 2004). Whether because a researcher had little or no involvement in collecting the primary data or through the passage of time, a researcher far removed from the context and circumstances of the original data collection may find it difficult to develop a trustworthy representation of the data (Gladstone et al., 2007; Heaton, 2004). In the current study, my close relationship to the data mitigates these concerns. As part of the original evaluation team I was involved in all aspects of the original study. Attending meetings with the community partners and reading documents prepared by the partners contributed depth to my understanding of the context surrounding the development of the initiative and the original evaluation study. Furthermore, I developed a thorough familiarity with the dataset through developing interview and focus group protocols, facilitating data collection, and analyzing and summarizing the primary data.

Now that I have established my proximity to the data, the following paragraphs are dedicated to describing the reflexive practices I engaged in to reflect on the data analysis and interpretation process. While clearly articulating the data analysis method employed is paramount to establishing the dependability of the research process (Vaismoradi et al., 2013), qualitative researchers must acknowledge that the researcher, method, and data are "reflexively interdependent and interconnected" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 414). Although the

presentation of methods as mechanical procedures and the use of computer software for analyzing qualitative data can confer a false sense of scientific objectivity or neutrality, qualitative analysis is a fundamentally interpretative process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). The researcher, not the specific techniques for analyzing the data or the data analysis software, serves as the instrument for analysis by making judgements about codes and themes, informed by their subjective experiences and positionality (Nowell et al., 2017).

While my understanding of the data was undoubtedly influenced by my experiences analyzing the dataset for the original evaluation study, I used clean, un-coded transcripts in the current study so that my codes were premised on the actual data, and not the previous interpretations the evaluation team had applied to the data. During data analysis and interpretation, while reading transcripts, coding speech segments, categorizing codes, and developing written descriptions of my findings, I recorded notes to document my impressions and feelings, draw connections between individuals and stakeholder groups, and highlight links with the literature. These notes were instrumental in encouraging my reflexivity in the research process, specifically by highlighting personal biases, assumptions, and views that were influencing how I interpreted the stakeholders' accounts of their experiences. For example, some school staffs' criticisms of the integrated student supports, particularly around the purposes of schools or goals of education, contrasted with my own views. However, my views are influenced by my positionality as a researcher deeply engaged with the evidence supporting these approaches (with much of the literature verging on advocacy), and by a lack of lived experience with the realities of working in a school environment. When unacknowledged and unexplored, a researcher's views may be expressed in the ways they write about and present certain themes (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Additional measures to disentangle my subjectivity from those of

the stakeholders included discussing contentions with members of the original research team, receiving peer feedback on my written interpretations, and ensuring that my writing was grounded in participants' direct quotations.

Ethical considerations. While secondary data analysis does not involve additional data collection with participants, it also does not absolve researchers of the responsibility to consider ethical issues (Heaton, 2004). Long-Sutehall et al. (2010) suggest that judgements about the re-use of data should consider the alignment between the original and secondary research questions. In the current study, the secondary research questions were directly relevant to the purpose of the original study, and in derived in part from the analyses conducted during the original study. Formal ethics approval to conduct the qualitative secondary analysis study was obtained from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board (Study ID Pro00078495) on the condition that only anonymized transcripts would be used, and data would be kept confidential and only shared with members of the original evaluation team. Given that the study did not involve any additional data collection with participants and used anonymized data, it represented minimal risk to participants. Approval was also obtained from the Cooperative Activities Program (CAP), which manages research activities involving Edmonton-area school districts. Furthermore, permission to use the data in a master's thesis was also obtained from the community partners who initiated the original evaluation study, to ensure that their agency and ownership of the data was respected and that they perceived the use of the data as mutually beneficial (Boser, 2007).

Analysis

As previously mentioned, in the current study I sorted the dataset to concentrate on a subsample of the original participants and focus the analysis on topics pertinent to the research questions (Heaton, 1998; Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). While various approaches to qualitative

data analysis have been developed, researchers conducting secondary analyses generally employ approaches compatible with the methods used in the primary study to gather and interpret the data, as the nature of the data constrains the types of analyses that are appropriate (Heaton, 2004). Mirroring the data analysis approach used in the original study, I used thematic analysis to analyze the data for the present study. Thematic analysis is defined as a descriptive "method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Unlike other qualitative data analysis methods that can be used to describe patterns across datasets (such as grounded theory and discourse analysis), thematic analysis is a flexible approach and is not inherently tied to any specific theoretical framework or data collection method, but nonetheless provides a detailed, complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). It is, however, underpinned by a "factist" perspective assuming that data is a relatively accurate and truthful index of reality, and therefore suited for research questions about participants' actual behavior, attitudes, and perceptions (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Aligning with the purpose of the research questions explored in this study, thematic analysis is recognized as a useful method for summarizing key features of large datasets, exploring the perspectives of different participants, and uncovering similarities and differences in perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

The steps for conducting thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013) guided my analyses. While I already possessed a large degree of familiarity with the dataset, the new focus of my thesis research required that I 're-immerse' myself in the data to deepen and expand my awareness of the content, with a particular focus on my research questions. This involved actively re-reading the transcripts, in which I searched for meanings and patterns across the

dataset and noted preliminary ideas for coding. More detailed coding followed, in which I systematically coded each transcript by assigning codes reflecting the meanings of relevant data segments using a qualitative data analysis software (NVivo). Once all the transcripts were coded, I organized the codes into broader, overarching themes by comparing them against one another to aid in differentiating the concepts and identifying commonalities. Reviewing and refining the themes involved comparing the themes against the entire dataset to ensure that important concepts were reflected. Indicative of the reflective and iterative process of qualitative data analysis, I continued to refine the themes throughout the process of writing the summary of the findings. I combined elements of both inductive (bottom-up) and deductive (top-down) approaches to generating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reflecting the deductive approach, I focused the analysis to information pertinent to my specific research questions, with the goal of producing a detailed analysis of specific aspects of the data identified through my analyses during the original study. I then applied an inductive approach where coding was data-driven on the basis of the information contained in the transcripts, as opposed to being guided by a preexisting coding framework.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness describes rigour or quality in a qualitative study, assessing whether the research was conducted in such a way as to produce meaningful and useful results (Nowell et al., 2017). Informed by the now widely accepted criteria for establishing rigour in qualitative research proposed by Lincoln and Guba in 1985, Nowell et al. (2017) suggest that a trustworthy thematic analysis study should address 4 criteria: (1) Credibility, (2) Transferability, (3) Dependability, and (4) Confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility considers how accurately the researcher has represented participants' actual perceptions and experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). In the present study, credibility was established through several strategies, including prolonged engagement in the research. As a continuing member of the team conducting the original evaluation study (which is ongoing at the time of writing), I have been actively engaged in collecting, analyzing, and summarizing the dataset used for this thesis for over a year. The data analysis process used in the evaluation study was highly collaborative, with team members meeting regularly to review, compare, and adapt codes and themes. We also met with certain stakeholder groups (e.g., agency staff, operational partners) to collaboratively reflect on the findings and interpretations of the original evaluation study. The researcher triangulation and member checking possible during the original study greatly enriched my understanding of the data when I approached it a second time to explore the questions addressed in my thesis research. Additional strategies used to establish credibility for the current research were peer debriefing with a member of the original study team to provide feedback on the findings and interpretations (Nowell et al., 2017), and triangulation across multiple sources of data by integrating the perspectives of several different stakeholder groups (Fusch & Lawrence, 2015).

Transferability. Transferability describes a study's generalizability to other contexts and individuals (Nowell et al., 2017). Establishing transferability requires providing sufficient information for readers to assess the similarities and differences between the context in which the study was conducted and their own context (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). In the present study, I addressed transferability by developing 'thick', detailed descriptions of the context surrounding the study background and its findings. By explaining the issues motivating the development of *AIFY*, and outlining the population it was developed for, I provide contextual information

essential to decisions about the transferability of findings and interpretations. Furthermore, I make extensive use of stakeholder quotations in my description of the study's findings to augment my own interpretations with the rich contextual detail that can only be conveyed in participants' own voices.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the stability of the findings over time (Anney, 2014), and can achieved by following a logical, traceable, and clearly documented research process (Nowell et al., 2017). In this thesis I have attempted to clearly articulate and justify my theoretical and methodological decisions, especially given that many readers may be less familiar with qualitative methodologies than quantitative. In addition, reflecting elements of the 'audit trail' used to provide others with evidence of the decisions made by a researcher throughout the course of a study, I kept reflexive notes to record my methodological choices, rationales, and personal reflections. Finally, while thematic analysis has been stereotyped as one of the simplest methods within qualitative research, the relative ease of learning this approach (contributed to by the availability of well-established guidelines for performing thematic analysis) confers advantages in terms of dependability for early career researchers. As a master's student, my practical experience with qualitative research has largely been confined to thematic analysis and the related method of content analysis. With its defined sequence of analytical stages, thematic analysis provides a clear, traceable method for data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Confirmability. Confirmability, the final criterion for assessing trustworthiness, is dependent on the establishment of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability addresses the degree to which findings are clearly derived from the data and can be corroborated by other researchers (Anney, 2014). Reflecting its dependence on the

other 3 criteria, strategies for promoting confirmability employed in this study overlap with those described previously, including reporting justifications for the theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions made throughout the study (Nowell et al., 2017), peer debriefing, and keeping reflexive notes throughout the research process (Anney, 2014).

Findings

The findings section of this thesis is comprised of 2 main parts corresponding to each research question. Part 1 integrates the interview and focus group data collected from agency staff, school staff, school administrators, and agency leaders working at the 5 demonstration schools and describes characteristics that can promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services. Part 2 synthesizes the interview and focus group data from the operational and steering partners responsible for higher-level planning and conceptualization of *AIFY* and explores their perspectives on influencing systems change.

Part 1: Characteristics that promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services

This section responds to the question of, in the words of one of the operational partners, "how [to] effectively integrate people who are non-educators into [the] school community". Across the 5 school sites, several characteristics were consistently identified by agency staff, school staff, school administrators, and agency leaders as promoting or impeding the integration of schools and community services. Two main themes emerged, along with several nested sub-themes. The first of the 2 major themes explores the roles of the administrators, agency staff, and school staff working at the schools, with attention to the interrelationships between stakeholders. The second theme, power and autonomy, describes barriers and facilitators related to schools and agencies negotiating different perspectives, mandates, and practices. The process of negotiating

these differences in merging schools and community services reflect politics of power between schools and community service agencies, and necessitate concessions to autonomy in order to create new ways of working together.

Roles and relationships.

Leadership from administrators. The importance of leadership from administrators in facilitating the integration of community services into the schools (or, in the case of uninvolved leadership, serving as a barrier) was reflected in the discussions of all 4 stakeholder groups. Administrators described being intentional at the beginning of the school year to ensure that the agency staff were not perceived as a mere "add on" to the school who "do their thing and then leave", but instead "were a part of our school and a part of our team". Supportive principals helped integrate the agency staff into the school communities by involving them in assemblies and school events, connecting them with students, families, and school staff, and acknowledging them as faculty members. Agency staff and leaders also recognized that the principal's reception of and involvement in *AIFY* influenced the "buy-in" of the other school staff. Agency staff brought a different perspective to the schools around working with children and youth, which was sometimes met with opposition or resistance from school staff. Principals were crucial in "bridging" the relationship between agency and school staff, with agency staff and leaders emphasizing the importance of "top-down" support from administrators for their work.

> I think that what really makes a difference [is] principal buy in. The principals that are consistently at the table for [team meetings]…certainly are the schools where, at least from my point of view, where we're having the most success. Where they're really hearing what we have to say in terms of how to support those youth and families, and really making true changes in their schools. Where they're expecting their teachers to act

> differently…Schools where we have absentee principals almost, where they come sometimes or come when they can…the teachers aren't on board, and we need it to be all encompassing. – Agency Leader

As the above quotation illustrates, principal disengagement served as a barrier to integration at some schools by contributing to difficulties with achieving buy-in from school staff. In some schools experiencing lower levels of principal involvement, principals were preparing to leave the schools the following year (which may have been a contributing factor to their disengagement). Although principal turnover may generally be regarded as a disruptive event with the potential to threaten progress made towards integration, agency staff and leaders perceived that the transition to a new administrative team in schools with low principal engagement could be an opportunity to establish more cooperative relationships.

In most of the demonstration schools, a member of the administrative team coordinated the *AIFY* initiative by overseeing student and family referrals to the agency staff, rather than encouraging students, families, and school staff to make direct referrals. Administrators reported that the coordinator role developed out of the needs to ensure that students receive appropriate services, prevent agency staff caseloads from exceeding capacity, liaise between parents, track the students accessing services, and identify students who might otherwise "fall through the cracks".

> We were really deliberate to have that filter through the office first as opposed to teachers finding the service provider, because unless you have a way to manage that connection you have too many, and rather than doing a mediocre job you want to try and have meaningful relationships and you want to try and establish those right away. So it was very intentional that students couldn't simply ask to…seek the service out, teachers

> couldn't simply direct a student to go find this service. We needed to figure out a little bit more about what's going on so we could help facilitate that. – School Administrator

Agency staff and leaders corroborated the improved accountability and efficiency of designating a single person to coordinate referrals to the services and supports. A mental health therapist, contrasting her experience as part of *AIFY* with her previous experience working in a school setting, commented on how filtering referrals through a coordinator (in this case, the assistant principal) streamlined the process and helped to make her caseload more manageable:

> So in previous years, [referrals] could come from a parent calling the school, talking to the secretary…they could come from teachers, they could come from admin. So I would have 7 different rivers of kids coming in, and of course I would never say no, so I could easily become overwhelmed. Switching this year, all of the referrals come through our assistant principal. So that transition has been really positive for me because I have been able to keep my caseload a little bit more manageable. – Agency Staff

Given the large demands on principals' time, agency leaders felt that the most successful schools were those where someone other than the principal was identified as the coordinator for *AIFY*, such as a vice principal or other school support staff (e.g., curriculum coordinator).

Agency staff availability and consistency. Several characteristics related to the roles of the agency staff emerged as supporting or hindering their integration into the schools. Chief among those contributing to greater integration were the interrelated concepts of the full-time availability and consistency of agency staff providing supports at the schools, which were stressed by those affiliated with both the agencies and the schools.

> Yeah, the full-time piece and having them available all the time is crucial. We've got people that come in like one day a week and stuff, and it hasn't got the same impact, not

> anywhere near [the same]. And crisis and emergencies or things like that, they don't wait for Friday, they come anytime. – School Administrator

One of the school administrators identified the support of a full-time team of community service providers as the greatest change from previous models of school-based support. In previous models, agency staff worked in schools on a part-time basis, and schools generally did not have the complement of a wraparound team working in collaboration to address the comprehensive range of needs experienced by students and families. Agency staff with experience working in schools before the implementation of *AIFY* made similar comparisons, noting the "dramatic shift" from those previous approaches to linking community service agencies and schools:

> …so it was just myself here at the school and sometimes we would have like a part-time [family support worker] or sometimes we might have a therapist, but that would change depending on the year. So I was the full-time worker. And occasionally we would have a fairly part-time person running our [afterschool program]. But all of these people were infrequent and changed year by year, and I was the only full-time one here, the constant. To watch it now go to where these are all full-time staff here at the school, that's a really big change. That's a significant difference. And I really believe that [previous program] really envisioned this, but…they just didn't have the level of resources to make it happen…we were always feeling a little bit frustrated because we got where they wanted to go, but we never had the feet on the ground to make it happen. So this is a, I can say, a very dramatic shift in the school. – Agency Staff

In the words of a school administrator, having a full-time team "completely changed the presence" of the agency staff in the schools, enabling greater communication and coordination

between the various agencies and the school staff, and reducing the duplication of services. Agency staff shared this view, with the agency staff teams at each of the 5 schools noting that the shift to full-time positions allowed them to establish a stronger presence in the school communities. Recognition as a consistent, stable presence in the schools helped agency staff to better build trusting relationships with students, parents, school staff, and one another. The importance of agency staff consistency is also emphasized by the finding, reflected across schools sites and stakeholder groups, that having an agency staff member with a prior history of working in a given school community represented on the agency staff team helped to facilitate a smoother transition to the full *AIFY* model. These agency staff were able to leverage the existing relationships they had formed with members of the school community to promote relationship-building among the additional agency staff joining the school. Furthermore, trusting relationships with different groups within the school communities emerged as a contributing factor to students' and parents' willingness to access the *AIFY* supports.

> We're figures in the school now. The kids know us, the staff know us, the admin know us, and we're a part of the family here. And so being here every day and having literally one room…that is recognized as the *All in for Youth* space, allows us to be a part of the school, that people are more accepting to what we're doing. Parents buy in more, teachers buy in more, and the kids are more into as well. – Agency Staff

Although financial constraints meant that some schools shared an agency staff member who split their time between two different schools, stakeholders emphasized that ideally each school should have a team of full-time agency staff dedicated exclusively to a single school community. Agency staff were adamant that "all of us on the *All In* team…need to be here full-time", given that balancing involvement at more than one school limited the depth of

relationships they could build with those in the school communities, and the quality of support they could provide for their team members.

Agency staff turnover was also identified as a barrier to integration experienced at some schools. Reinforcing the importance of the consistent presence of the agency staff in the schools for integration, changes in agency staff could damage relationships with students and school staff by contributing to a sense of mistrust:

> I feel consistency maybe. There have been some movements with people. I don't know if they've gone to other schools or gotten different jobs, but there have been a couple of people who have been replaced. So I feel like that's kind of a barrier for some of the kids, especially the younger ones who need that consistency because they start to form a bond and then all of a sudden that person is gone. Which for some of them I feel like it kind of mimics maybe what happens in their family life or with their friendships: 'I don't want to get too close to this person because then they might be gone'. So…that inconsistency has been a little bit of a problem, but some things are unavoidable I guess. – School Staff

Although administrators working in different school communities had varying experiences of agency staff turnover in their schools, they shared a common hope to maintain consistency in the people comprising their agency staff teams over subsequent school years. An administrator at a school that had experienced frequent agency staff turnover noted that this contributed to an "ongoing sense of building trust, building team" that made it difficult for the team to maintain momentum, thereby threatening the sustainability of the initiative. Administrators of schools where agency staff teams had "embedded themselves in the school culture" stressed consistency as essential in order to build on, rather than undermine, the foundation of trust established over the first year of *AIFY*.

***Agency staff expectations*.** Tensions surfaced around the expectations on agency staff, reflecting challenges with negotiating roles between agency leaders and school staff and administrators. A major source of tension for agency staff was attempting to balance expectations from organizational managers within their community agencies with expectations from the schools. The following quotation illustrates the competing priorities agency staff felt between responsibilities to their employers and to their partnering schools:

> So this speaks to the collaborative nature of working in a school. So we're all these outside agencies. This isn't our school. We work within the school, we are part of the school, but we're not paid by the school – they are not our bosses, they are our partners. And so it's like, we also have to learn how to collaborate with the school. – Agency Staff

While agency leaders had specific expectations around the roles and responsibilities of agency staff, school staff and administrators often had different expectations that could conflict or take time away from those 'formal' roles. In part, this was due to the fact that *AIFY* brought together two sectors with a relatively limited knowledge of the intricacies of one another's operations. Furthermore, embedding community services within school buildings required some adaptations to the ways agency and school staff were accustomed to working. For example, a family support worker articulated challenges with transitioning from working predominantly with formal cases to working on a more informal basis with families in the school community. Understanding and trust also had to be built with school staff and administrators around the significant amount of time that family support workers spend interacting with families and liaising with community services outside of the school building. Given the emphasis stakeholders placed on agency staff establishing a presence in the school community, it is perhaps unsurprising that agency staff whose positions deviated from the typical school day,

particularly afterschool program coordinators and family support workers, described some initial challenges with school staff understanding or accepting their roles:

> I've had to do a lot of front end informing them and talking to them about 'this is what I do'. And then they've had to see that in action to believe it. Because for the school system, they know their staff is in the building, they're working…So now they know, just because I'm not here, doesn't mean I'm not working… - Agency Staff

In addition, many agency staff took on responsibilities beyond their formal roles (e.g., supervising recess, coaching school sports teams) in order to build relationships with others in the school communities:

> I think with building and becoming ingrained in the school community there's a lot of…'I want to be part of all this, I want to be part of this'. But then you also have your job description and those other requirements that lots of people don't see as part [of it]. [They're] like 'oh, you just run an after school program, what do you mean? What else do you do during the day'? You know what I mean? So it's just like trying to find the balance and like educating…but also being part of everything, too. Because you want to be a part as much as you can, because that's how you [will] be effective, but then also still being able to…develop a new team, [because] that's what we're doing, learning a new job description. I think almost all of us are in a new role than we have been…I just think there's a lot that goes into that as well, that collaborating and everything. – Agency Staff

However, while agency staff often felt an implicit sense of obligation to fill perceived needs in the school communities, this could detract from their capacity to fulfill the expectations of the roles their agencies outlined for them. Agency leaders tended to be more critical of agency

staff acting outside their roles or feeling "guilted" by schools to take on additional tasks. They felt they had a responsibility to help their staff feel more "empowered" to draw boundaries and absorb any resulting pushback from schools. However, agency leaders also acknowledged that their own lack of clarity to agency staff around roles and expectations contributed to this situation. Indeed, agency staff teams at several schools found that expectations from agency leaders could be delivered with tight deadlines, creating pressure to accommodate increasing responsibilities with inadequate preparation, intentionality, and time. Furthermore, messages were sometimes disseminated inconsistently to agency staff members or lacked clarity. Team members at one school described how they experienced role confusion due to poorly defined and shifting responsibilities that impacted their expectations of one another and contributed to challenges with team dynamics. These examples illustrate how communication emerged as an ongoing issue, embedded within the ambiguity around roles and responsibilities.

Teacher involvement. The discussion thus far has already alluded to the centrality of teacher buy-in to successfully embedding community services at school sites by outlining characteristics related to relationship building that can contribute to teacher acceptance of agency staff activities. Variations in these characteristics were perceived as contributing to the inconsistency in buy-in to the *AIFY* initiative by teachers across the 5 school sites. In addition, stakeholders identified involving teachers as collaborators in the wraparound approach as a distinct theme supporting teacher buy-in. Stakeholders recognized the value of teachers' knowledge and experiences for identifying the students in need of supports and services, and connecting them to appropriate services. Teachers were not merely perceived as gatekeepers to accessing students, but as important collaborators in the decision-making processes of agency staff who could help to facilitate service provision.

> I mean I would say that collaboration is always going to be better, and particularly the teachers feeling like they have a voice on the team of people that are wrapping around these kids. Like I think the relationship between the teachers and our team is key because there's just too many opportunities, if that communication isn't happening, for tidbits of information to be missing. For there not to be action when there should be action because someone didn't say the right thing to the right person for that action to be stimulated…I think it's really good that we have the collaboration between the agency staff and the teachers… - School Administrator

Agency leaders referred to teacher involvement as a "missing optic" in previous approaches to integrating community services into the school context. The quote from a school staff member included below corroborates this view, while conveying the desire shared by many school staff for greater involvement in supporting students. The school employing this particular staff member was unique among the *AIFY* demonstration sites in that it had adopted an approach to promoting teacher involvement that included teachers in the weekly review and planning meetings held among the agency staff team. This approach recognized teachers' insights into students' lives as a valuable complement to the work of the agency staff. It also facilitated a two-way exchange of information where agency staff were able to keep teachers informed about their students and the supports they were receiving, allowing greater coordination between supports in and out of the classroom:

> Before [with] our family therapists or social workers or whoever, we were never included in the meetings. And we brought that up a couple years ago, and the reason was, well, they just didn't know when [it could happen]…So in the last 2 months maybe it started now…they have a schedule, and we have our [prep time] that we're invited in…I mean,

> we're with the kids the whole time – that was one concern we had, I mean we spend the whole day with them but nobody's really asking us…so now they're getting our input and they're also telling us what they're finding out at their end. – School Staff

In addition to facilitating reciprocal information sharing, agency staff at the school noted that collaborating with teachers created a larger supportive network to access when determining the best way to establish a connection with students and families in need of services:

> And then with teachers, we've included them into our team huddles to get their perspective on how they see the kids and how we can get me connected to the families through the teachers sometimes, because that might be the best relationship, or how we can work towards creating that relationship with the parents depending on the scenario. – Agency Staff

While stakeholder groups representing both schools and agencies consistently acknowledged the importance of formalized opportunities to bring school and agency staff into collaboration, agency leaders noted that the strategy involving regular meetings between teachers and agency staff had tradeoffs related to time efficiency. The magnified number of people and perspectives created additional meetings and, consequently, demands on agency and school staff's time. Agency leaders were equivocal about whether this approach represented the solution to long-standing neglect of teacher involvement in models of linking community services and schools.

Power and autonomy.

Alignment with school culture. The fit or alignment of the *AIFY* model with the culture of the school emerged as another characteristic that could facilitate or impede the integration of the community service providers into the school environment. The *AIFY* staff were guided by

what they described as a "trauma-informed perspective", an approach that looks beyond surface behaviours to explore and address the underlying factors at all levels of a child's environment that may be contributing to those behaviours. However, the extent to which schools were receptive to this shift from the traditional focus on academics and learning varied. The following quotation is from a school administrator whose school recently underwent a cultural shift that created a receptive environment for a program operating from a trauma-informed perspective:

> I think for us like as part of our cultural change in the building we were…creating a culture of high expectations for the kids. And we talked about, this is prior to the *All in for Youth* team joining us, and it was that notion of setting all the expectations at the ceiling, but making sure that you're scaffolding supports to get the kids there. And one really important piece that we talked about was that getting to know the kid's story. And so when the *All in for Youth* team came in I think it was a natural tie in because we had already really reinforced, like, so if a student's repeatedly coming late, you know you can deal with it in a consequential fashion, but it's also important to ensure that we find out why, like what's going on and why, but then still address the issue. So I think that the team came in and was complementary of that… – School Administrator

Other schools placed a high priority on academics, and seemed relatively uncompromising in terms of that focus. In these environments, it could be more difficult to achieve buy-in from school staff. Furthermore, entrenched notions of community services and education as achieving separate goals were pervasive among school staff. While some school staff spoke favorably of being part of a school culture where "curriculum sometimes comes second", others stressed that a school's first priority should be learning.

> …[the agency staff] understand that the first thing that goes on here is education, and they're here, their job is to support a kid's ability to learn, not further interfere, I guess is sort of that philosophy, right. Not undervaluing what they do, because I absolutely value what they do. It's just a matter of [understanding] that this is still a school, so that's our first priority. And it needs to be and that needs to be respected because that's what we do here. And the fact that you guys are here to support us and help our kids that have so many other things going on and would never be able to get the support, it's amazing. – School Staff

However, regardless of overall sense of school culture, agency staff at most of the schools perceived opposition from some educators, predominantly those who did not share an appreciation of the trauma-informed perspective:

> I think teachers are just education based, just focusing on literacy and making sure this child reads. Whereas we're thinking well this child's not going to read until we figure out how to help him in his home environment where we know there's things going on. So helping them understand that. We need to deal with some of those basic needs before we can even get into learning about literacy. So that piece. Sometimes I don't think they understand how important that is. – Agency Staff

One way agency staff attempted to bridge this ideological divide was through professional development sessions and presentations to teachers to build awareness of what it means to work from a trauma-informed perspective, noting that most teacher education programs remain focused on academics and behavioural management. Another strategy mentioned by an agency staff member was to tie their programming in with the school's focus around literacy, creating greater integration between their work and the overall school culture.

This notion of adapting to the school culture emerged as highly important to school staff, with school staff at nearly every school conveying a desire for a greater integration of the agency staff and their programming into the culture of the school. School staff generally valued the aims of the agency staff to support students' non-academic needs, but many desired greater integration with the objectives of the school and its organizational policies. Some school staff felt that the *AIFY* initiative should "augment programming already in the school", rather than try to shift its focus:

> …overall this is a really great program for the kids at this school. They seem to be really enjoying it. I think that more could be done to better integrate into the school itself and make sure that the programming that's being provided fits in line with the objectives that we're trying to teach the kids for being at school as well. – School Staff

An administrator at one of the schools remarked that the approach by the agency staff to align themselves with the school culture contributed to the development of a complementary relationship between school and agency staff:

> …having worked in a site that had various agencies in different capacities, this has been, it's been very positive. We've been able to strike a balance between the work they do with the work we do. Neither one is really superseding, but complimenting… they've acclimatized themselves to be a part of our school culture as opposed to trying to superficially apply something external, which I think a lot of places fail because it's just like a Band-Aid, it'll fall off. But they've been interwoven into what we do and there's, and that's the biggest difference. They've said 'this is the culture of [the school], how can we be a part of it?', as opposed to how can we cover over top of it or how can we be, you know, alongside of it…That's why I think we're very successful and it's been…we're

still working, but that's what's making it more of a positive experience. – School Administrator

Compatibility of practice. Issues of power and autonomy surfaced not only at the ideological level around perspectives to working with students, but also around agency staff's practice in the school setting and, specifically, the implications of their practice on the school staff. Overlapping with the discussion of agency staff roles and responsibilities, translating the roles and practices of agency staff from a community service to educational environment created challenges for both school and agency staff. Part of this tension was attributed to the lack of preparation and shared education about one another's roles, orientations to working with children, and the expectations and responsibilities associated with working in a school environment that differ from working in a community service agency:

> I think that some disconnects that happen because we're in an educational background with a very certain knowledge of what our legal roles and responsibilities are, and that's a social services background and they're very different…and there was no time spent even educating each other about how this was. It was more like 'this will be great, they will take on that role so you can focus on the education'. But it doesn't just actually happen that way. There has to be more dialogue, so it's a learning process and there are some things that are then changing and improving, but that was really difficult in this already high needs environment to then have that extra layer because it did feel like a… just a frustration with extra layer of work that we didn't feel like we could manage.
>
> – School Staff

> Well it's also understanding our role within the district, too, because we're all employed by someone other than…the district system, so we don't come from that background. We

> don't have an automatic understanding of how the school operates and the higher ups and what they say, so we just can come from what we know. But how it kind of meshes together is… - Agency Staff

Whereas previous approaches to integrating schools and community services in Edmonton have often been characterized by a power imbalance skewing in favor of the educational system, where schools contract service providers and set the parameters of their work, the collaborative relationship at the heart of *AIFY* calls for greater power sharing. However, the schools and agencies partnering to implement the *AIFY* initiative may have underestimated one another's inflexibility in terms of re-negotiating practices and policies. Interviews and focus groups with school staff and administrators underscored the importance of dialogue and mutual learning before the implementation of a new initiative to explore how services and supports may need to be adapted to fit with the legal and practical constraints of a school environment, requiring tradeoffs for both parties in terms of autonomy:

> I think that what would allow for that is like here are our bottom lines. And not just from a school perspective, but from the social services background, too. And then we can find commonalities between like [school board], this is their building, there are some things that you have to be complying with and legalities. And then you can bring that to the table. And then the *All in for Youth*, they have a different way of working with kids. So I think they, in a sense it was like 'here is what we're willing to offer, and we're going to outpost it in your building, whether it works or not', without even checking if that would work or not. – School Staff

School staff and administrators expressed concerns about student safety, discipline and behavioural management, respect for school equipment, and cleanliness of the schools. The

afterschool programming consistently emerged as one of the most difficult components of the wraparound model of support to successfully adapt to the school setting. Because the schedules of the afterschool program coordinators did not conform to the typical school day, they were not as visible to school staff as some of the other agency staff and had more limited opportunities to build relationships and trust through regular interaction. In addition, many school staff perceived that the expectations around acceptable behavior enforced during the school day were neglected during the afterschool programming, creating inconsistent expectations for students. Some school staff felt that this inconsistency was contributing to problem behaviours crossing over into the school day, and exacerbating difficulties with discipline and behavioural management in classrooms. Finally, some school staff and administrators noted a mismatch between the open, drop-in format typical of community programming and school regulations around monitoring student registration and attendance. School staff desired greater communication with afterschool programming staff around activities, field trips, and student attendance.

Reflecting the importance of school and agency staff working together to develop collaborative solutions, one afterschool program coordinator described working with the school administrator to develop a formal registration process for students at the school to address staff's concerns. The program coordinator also created lists for each teacher highlighting the students in their classes registered for the program as a way to keep teachers informed about the program and establish open lines of communication. This example demonstrates how stakeholders bringing two separate systems into collaboration must be open to solutions that may challenge or deviate from their traditional ways of working:

> So that was new for me because…I'm used to working at like the YMCA, the Green Shack, like places where kids just come and go and it's really lackadaisical. So this was

different…but it's formed into something that can be sustainable here, which is good. – Agency Staff

Part 2: Initiative decision-makers' perspectives on influencing systems change

One of the foundational principles of *AIFY* is systems change, with a focus on informing how school and community systems support children, youth, and families. This section explores the discourses of the operational and steering partners responsible for developing and making decisions about *AIFY* around influencing systems change. The desire to shift from the small-scale implementation of integrated student supports in select schools to a broader scale implementation as the result of system-wide changes is represented by the following comment:

I want an integrated approach. So I think that's what [*All In for Youth*] brings to this. You've got like a little integrated approach, but how do we do a bigger and better and systems integrated approach? – Operational Partner

Before progressing to the discussion of the themes pertaining to this research question, it is important to clarify that in advocating for systems change, the operational and steering partners did not necessarily mean the implementation of the full, comprehensive *AIFY* model in all schools. Rather, stakeholders tended to share a vision for contributing to school, community, and government systems that are supportive of the integration of schools and community services, focusing on socially vulnerable communities and adapting the model to meet the unique needs of the school communities and accommodate existing services.

Government support. Many operational and steering partners believed that influencing widespread change around school-based models of service delivery would require support from government, particularly at the provincial level.

> So for long-term I think we get government on side because…I think community has a role, but if we're trying to educate kids and build families up it's bigger than a community or a municipal responsibility, right. And figure out how then funding can be worked to support that moving forward. – Steering Partner
>
> I don't think it only belongs to the philanthropists and the private sector funders to make this work. I think it also relies on systems change by government, where I have no doubts if certain things changed, money could be released so that models like this could work even better. – Operational Partner

To borrow from the words of one of the operational partners, "when we talk about scaling, we talk about sustainability". Ultimately, stakeholders felt that without commitment from the provincial government in the form of policy changes and funding *AIFY* would not be sustainable at the demonstration schools in its current form over the long-term, let alone expanding the program to other schools in the city. Several individuals voiced concerns that community non-profit organizations and private funders lacked the resources and influence necessary to move *AIFY* from a discrete program implemented at a limited number of schools to a widespread approach to integrating schools and community services.

> Well, the bottom line is that we're going to have to get the province on board…It's not going to happen without them. And we're going to have to get school boards on side. [Non-profit organizations] can't raise enough money for this. It's got to be more at a societal level, and the province are the big funders… – Steering Partner
>
> …we've had to pull a lot of resources together from the community to even do this pilot, and so the best we could possibly do is continue for a few more years. There's no way we

> could expand it to the rest of the schools that need it without government resources. The order of magnitude of charitable money versus government is just all wrong for that. – Steering Partner
>
> …we don't really have a policy framework where this can hang. And I say that because I really do think that the Department of Education needs a policy framework where this kind of integrated services to support success of students in school have to have a home. And that home has to be funded and supported…– Steering Partner

However, engendering government support was recognized as a complex endeavor, due in part to the shifting and unpredictable political landscape. An operational partner noted that the political context into which *AIFY* was born was well aligned with the program's long-term focus on poverty reduction:

> I think there's also a bit of readiness in community. So thinking about the political environment, right, thinking about the municipal government, the provincial government, the federal government, are all aligned in their vision and in their value of poverty elimination and reduction and so I think to a certain degree…there's a community readiness and a political readiness for this kind of an approach that I think is good that we're in a position where we can kind of jump on it and leverage it and hopefully benefit from it. – Operational Partner

But while leveraging political readiness was identified as one avenue for promoting systems change, the short-term, perpetually changing priorities of government emerged as a barrier. As articulated by one of the steering partners, change on a systems level requires a sustained commitment, which conflicts with the transitory nature of government administrations and political priorities. Comments by one of the operational partners expanded on this notion,

conveying concerns that a political shift away from a focus on supporting vulnerable populations would make it increasingly difficult to win government support for *AIFY*:

> …I don't know how to do this, but making it a priority in government. And I say I don't know how to do this, in part because there's so many competing priorities and it's a political environment. So the challenge is…right now we have a NDP very supportive government around these issues and around how to address them. During the next election, who knows what will happen. If it becomes a very conservative environment, there may not be the same types of supports and we know that they will probably say we need to balance the budget and there will be huge cuts, which then has even bigger impacts. – Operational Partner

The lack of integration among Alberta's provincial ministries was also regarded as a barrier to influencing systems change:

> I mean, you've probably heard this a million times…those ministries don't work together, really, which is part of the problem. So you have [Children's] Services and Education and Justice and Health all, you know…working with the same people but not working together with the same people. And I think that is a bit of a barrier too in this particular case as well. – Operational Partner

School board support. Amassing support from school boards was also identified as a crucial element in influencing systems change. Because stakeholders were committed to the vision of *AIFY* as a true partnership between community service agencies and schools, several felt that changes would need to occur among Edmonton's school boards in order to systematize an integrated model of service delivery. Similar to discussions of government support, stakeholders perceived that developing policies conducive to community service integration and

committing funding for integrated models of service delivery were necessary at the school board level.

> I think our school boards need to be talking about is this work helping them facilitate greater success for kids? Then what's their contribution to this? And their contribution might look like data, and their contribution might look like staff being allowed to attend meetings, or staff coordination, or money from their budget…I really believe there needs to be policies within the schoolboards and policy within the Department of Education to support that. – Steering Partner

One of the steering partners suggested that without policies at the school board level to support the integration of community services and schools, progress towards integration might be lost if changes in school administration were to occur. School board policies could play a role in supporting the sustainability of the integrated, wraparound approach to work between community agencies and schools advocated by *AIFY* by providing the infrastructure to support and encourage the implementation of integrated student supports. Furthermore, another steering partner described the importance of considering the interaction and alignment between policies across levels of the education system, including local schools, school boards/districts, and provincial government ministries. Schools in Edmonton follow a model of local decision-making referred to as school or site-based management, but these decisions are made in the context of and are influenced by policies and legislation enacted at higher levels of the education system. It is important to consider both directions of influence: bottom-up from local schools, and top-down from government.

Finally, a steering partner remarked that having individuals in senior leadership positions at the school boards sitting on the steering committee was a strength of *AIFY* in advocating for

systems change. Engaging these key partners from the beginning of the initiative could create opportunities for influencing the desired changes to school board policies and funding:

> …that's maybe another positive of the partnership is because both school boards and their senior leadership sit at the steering committee, so you can start to make changes. These things can be raised at that level and slowly they can trickle down, right. – Steering Partner

Evidence and impact. The need for "evidence that says this has an impact" dominated discussions of how to attain support from government, school boards, and other potential funding organizations and decision-makers that could play a role in the scaling and sustainability of *AIFY*.

> If we can articulate that what we're doing is making a difference, people will begin to listen. I think that we're evidence-based, which is great, we're really using, in my mind, practices that have been tried and true…But it needs to move so that we have – we need data. We need to know what the collective has been and we need to know what the outcomes have been for those children and families, and we need to be able to articulate that. And I think if we can do that, then you have some leverage with particularly, I'm hoping, Alberta Education. – Operational Partner

> …we are going to need a strong body of evidence to say 'hey, this really is working for kids'...I think we do work with the systems, but you know they've got their politics as well and many, many things coming at them and saying 'this is the answer, this is the answer, this is the answer'. And so yeah, so that's complex but it's going to be required. – Steering Partner

One of the steering partners articulated the importance of understanding the evidence and information required by government to generate support for the *AIFY* model. The following except from the interview with this individual reflects the previously discussed challenge around shifting political priorities. It also captures the need to have partners with strong linkages to diverse government sectors represented among the steering committee, in order to leverage those relationships and engage ministries that all have a stake in supporting children, youth, and families but (as was noted earlier) may not have strong communication or collaboration with one another.

> So I think there's, they're going to need our outcomes and data that we get, right, whatever we can show that we're improving things. But I think we need to work, and we've already asked, there's someone from the Ministry of Education at the table, and already said 'so what do we need to be able tell your bosses to make things happen'? And I think we need to look at that in health too. What are the things that the Ministry of Health needs to see that this is a positive change down the road for resources that could help? I think it's a real collaborative thing, maybe too with Indigenous Relations. Like I think there's lots of opportunities to look at what does government really need to know? And, you know, to be fair that could change in a couple years to what does the new government need to know.…I think we're going to have to be really conscious of that. And I think we need to use people that have connections to do that. So you know we have partners at the table that have strong connections with different areas…So it's looking at all those things and figuring out what information, what information are we collecting that's good and useful for those, and what information do we still need.
>
> – Steering Partner

However, despite the hopes and expectations pinned to evidence of the program's impacts, challenges emerged with respect to generating this evidence. Many operational and steering partners described challenges with demonstrating the value of an initiative focused on addressing complex, long-term social issues, given that certain impacts could not realistically be achieved within the program's funded 3-year demonstration period. The *AIFY* partners were faced with mediating the pressure of the "huge community expectations" on *AIFY* as one of the initiatives tied to the *EndPoverty Edmonton* roadmap for addressing poverty with the reality of a brief, 3-year demonstration period:

> [*All in for Youth* is] identified by *End Poverty Edmonton* as one of the ways we are going to address poverty in our region, and so we're really committed to it. We're really committed because we believe that every partner at that table really believes working with our kids can truly change the game and can truly have long-term impact, but it's not a one year or two year solution, it's a generation. It's going to take a long time. So hopefully we have the support we need to make that happen. – Operational Partner

As noted by one of the operational partners, the "short-term wins" often prioritized and compensated by funders were at odds with the "generational" nature of *AIFY's* anticipated impact. The outcomes that stakeholders could measure during the 3-year demonstration did not necessarily represent the impressive changes that funders expected to be accomplished in a relatively brief time period.

One way stakeholders attempted to compensate for this challenge was to generate evidence of short-term outcomes that could demonstrate the positive effects the program was currently having on children, youth, and families. Stakeholders hoped that demonstrating these

interim results would inspire enough confidence in the program to engender financial support for additional years of implementation, and serve as indicators of future positive impacts.

> …it's really hard to do good evaluation of very short-term programs. Especially in areas like this where, by design, many of the outcomes are expected to be longer term. But if you know you only got funding for 1 year or 3 years or whatever, then you try to find numbers that show in that time frame and use those. Because what's the point of looking at stuff that's going to have results in 10 years when the program won't be around anymore? – Steering Partner

> But for something like this, it takes time. Hopefully not 12 years. Hopefully we can show some shorter term impacts that will cause some confidence in the work, which will ultimately lead to some longer term…being able to sustain this and then also create some longer term impact for the kids. – Steering Partner

Another strategy for establishing confidence in the program, despite the inaccessibility of long-term impacts, was building the program on an evidence base of approaches with demonstrated success in other contexts.

> So I think you have to ground it in evidence-based research and you do the best you can and you infer based on those interventions, even if you can't track long-term, that it will ultimately have the desired impact. – Steering Partner

> Like I think that we built a model based on what we felt was a solid foundation of saying you know, the research says if we do this, we'll get this outcome. We built it based on knowing what was producing good outcomes in the past. – Operational Partner

However, challenging the widespread belief among operational and steering partners that "evidence and demonstrating effectiveness is the key to long-term government funding", one of

the steering partners questioned the extent to which evidence actually influences government decisions and policies:

> …we always dreamed that particularly the government funders will finally respond to evidence. I think there's relatively little evidence that that happens very often. I think one generally notices that evidence is necessary, but it's not usually sufficient. And so how one intervenes in the rest of the policy-making process is a much more challenging issue…But you keep trying and you keep wanting to believe when governments say that they want to make evidence-based decisions, so you try to give them evidence and sometimes it works and sometimes not so much. And you know, if we didn't believe there was at least some possibility, then there wouldn't be any point in doing any of this stuff. – Steering Partner

Summary of Themes

I conclude this section with a table summarizing the main findings corresponding to my first research question: what characteristics promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services? While findings pertaining to the second research question around influencing systems change are best suited to description in the narrative structure provided above, the discussion of integration contains several distinct points regarding characteristics that promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services. These are summarized in the following table, organized by relevant sub-theme.

Table 3

Characteristics that promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services

	Promote Integration	Impede Integration
Leadership from administrators	• Supportive, involved school administration • Administrator (or other 'lead' person) coordinates referrals to agency staff	• Uninvolved/disengaged school administration
Agency staff availability and consistency	• Full-time team of agency staff dedicated to working with a single school community • Consistency in agency staff over time • Previous experience with integrated student supports at the school	• Agency staff working part-time/splitting their time between multiple schools • Agency staff turnover
Agency staff expectations	• Coordination of agency staff roles and responsibilities between agencies and schools • Clear communication of role expectations	• Different role expectations for agency staff from agencies and schools • Unclear communication of role expectations
Teacher involvement	• Teacher buy-in and relationships with agency staff • Engage teachers in collaboration and decision-making about students • Respect and acknowledge teachers' perspectives and knowledge about students	• Exclusion of teachers from decision-making about students
Alignment with school culture	• School culture receptive to integrated student supports • Professional development for teachers around perspectives/orientations of agency staff • Adapt integrated student supports to existing school goals/programs	• School culture inhospitable to integrated student supports • Beliefs that community services and education have separate/ irreconcilable goals

Compatibility of practice	• Dialogue and mutual learning between agency staff and teachers before program implementation • Openness to ongoing collaboration to adapt existing organizational practices and develop new ways of working together	• Lack of shared understanding of one another's practices and perspectives • Unwillingness or inability to change ways of working to accommodate new services

Discussion

Through a secondary analysis of qualitative data, the current study explored the first-year implementation of a model of integrated student supports targeting barriers to students' learning and well-being in 5 schools serving students with complex needs in a Western Canadian city. This study identified several characteristics that can promote and/or impede the integration of schools and community services. Moving beyond program implementation at individual school sites to a systems approach to supporting students and families with complex needs, this study also explored initiative decision-makers' perspectives around influencing systems-level change. The following discussion addresses these findings and their significance, concluding with a consideration of study limitations and suggestions for future research on integrated student supports.

Integration

By drawing on conversations with school and agency staff and leaders across 5 school sites implementing a model of integrated student supports, this study identified characteristics that can promote or impede the integration of schools and community services. Several intersecting characteristics emerged, with differences across school sites demonstrating how different levels of these features (e.g., low vs. high principal engagement) can serve to enhance or inhibit integration. These characteristics were organized around 2 main themes: roles and

relationships, and power and autonomy. Within roles and relationships, 4 features of the school communities were linked to integration: (1) administrator leadership; (2) agency staff availability and consistency; (3) agency staff expectations; (4) teacher involvement. The 2 features pertaining to power and autonomy included (1) alignment with school culture, and (2) compatibility of practice. While reviewing the table summarizing these themes included at the conclusion of the findings section (Table 3), one will notice that some of the characteristics that promote and/or impede integration are mutable and represent strategies or recommendations that can be enacted at any point during the life of an initiative, while others refer to contextual factors of the school community that are relatively resistant to change. Whole both categories of findings have implications for practice, the latter are especially important to consider at the beginning of an initiative when planning for the implementation of integrated student supports.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature affirming the centrality of school leadership for integrated student supports (Blank et al., 2003; McMahon et al., 2000; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2018). In a recent comparative analysis of the literature on school leadership in school-community partnerships, Valli et al. (2018) found that leadership is especially crucial to more comprehensive forms of partnership that involve changes in school norms. This is reflected in the findings of the current study, where school administrators were instrumental in bridging relationships between teachers and agency staff, who often encountered barriers to integration around differences in perspectives and practices. While agency staff and leaders hoped to shift the balance between students' educational needs and needs for support services at the schools, they encountered resistance from school staff who maintained the schools' traditional educational mandate or perceived that supports were interfering with learning (Dryfoos, 2002). Given the transitory nature of school leadership,

ongoing training and support to help school administrators sustain their responsibilities in cultivating a school climate receptive to models of integrated student supports is crucial (Valli et al., 2018).

As Quinn and Dryfoos (2009) assert, although the processes of planning and implementing collaborative models appear complex, they ultimately rely on relationship building. Indeed, in the present study relationships were perceived as foundational to the success of the initiative for supporting students and families. One of the greatest contributors to relationship building identified by stakeholders was the full-time availability of the agency staff in the schools. Consistency in the agency staff was also important, but the reality of staff turnover, especially as some schools struggled with finding appropriate agency staff, created challenges. Agency staff turnover emerged as a barrier to integration by weakening relationships among partners and contributing to a sense of mistrust. While some staff turnover is unavoidable, mechanisms to ensure the staff selected for certain roles have the necessary training, skills, and commitment to successfully transition to working on an interagency team in a school environment may help address challenges around staff consistency (McMahon et al, 2000).

Barriers cited around expectations on agency staff reflect the divided loyalties described by McMahon et al. (2000). Agency staff are faced with balancing commitments to their collaborative, school-based teams, and to their home agencies. Many agency staff found it difficult to reconcile these competing expectations, especially because taking on responsibilities in the schools beyond their formal roles was perceived as important to building relationships and trust with school staff and students. A lack of clarity around the expectations for agency staff communicated from their home agencies also contributed to challenges around role expectations. Formal documentation of specific and realistic goals and clear delineation of expectations may

be helpful for addressing these challenges (McMahon et al., 2002; Valli et al., 2016), but this study also highlights the need for collaboration between schools and agencies in determining these objectives and expectations. Stakeholders must negotiate an appropriate balance between activities that help build relationships between agency staff and members of the school communities, and activities related to their formal roles. This relies on educating school administrators and school staff about the different roles served by the various agency staff. Both schools and agencies must be willing to adapt their expectations in order to define new roles for the agency staff that represent a collaborative way of working between the 2 systems, acknowledging and clarifying power sharing, boundaries, and responsibilities (Valli et al., 2016).

The importance of teacher buy-in for integration interwoven throughout the discussion of findings is widely recognized in the literature (Chen et al., 2016, Dryfoos, 2002; McMahon et al., 2000), with some authors going so far as to state that any partnership approach implemented without first achieving consensus from school staff is likely 'doomed' from the start (Valli et al., 2018). In the current study, involving teachers in the wraparound approach for supporting students was identified as an important contributor to teacher buy-in. When teachers felt that they were valued partners with the agency staff and had opportunities to contribute their specific expertise and insights about students' lives, they were more supportive of the initiative.

However, there has been little discussion of the specific roles that teachers can serve in integrated student support initiatives (McMahon et al., 2000), and a lack of teacher involvement due to burnout has surfaced as a barrier in some cases (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). In this study, only 1 school had developed specific processes to engage teachers in decision-making with the agency staff by having them attend collaborative meetings during teachers' preparation time. While stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of those opportunities, some

expressed concerns that the school's approach was not time efficient, and could increase the already large demands on both school and agency staff's time. Although there is a clear need to involve teachers in planning school-based initiatives, defining their expectations and involvement, and maintaining their involvement throughout implementation, questions persist around the best processes or strategies to achieve teacher involvement (McMahon et al., 2000). It is also likely that there is no single 'best' approach, and that by involving teachers in defining their expectations and level of involvement before implementation of the initiative, strategies tailored to their unique school contexts and time availability could be identified.

Some individuals have argued that the real challenge in integrating schools and community services is to "develop innovative governance structures that redistribute power and authority" (McMahon et al., 2000, p. 83) between schools and community agencies. While school administrators certainly expressed a desire for the agency staff working in their schools to be seen as fully integrated members of the school communities, the tensions articulated around the receptiveness of the school culture and staff to the agency staff demonstrate the significant challenges that exist around negotiating power and autonomy. The alignment of the school culture with the perspectives of the agency staff, or the extent to which the school environment was receptive to re-negotiating the balance between learning and addressing underlying barriers to learning, were clear contributors to integration of schools and community services. However, resistance from school staff was a common barrier across school sites, even those with an overall school culture supportive of integrated students supports.

Challenges around linking the agency staff's activities to the school's own improvement goals reflect a barrier previously identified by Epstein (1995). School staff widely desired greater integration between the work of the agency staff and the school's pre-existing objectives,

policies, and programming. McMahon et al. (2000) suggest that school systems tend to hold a disproportionate share of the power and authority in models of integrated student supports, in part because the school building serves as the site of service delivery and the integration of services ultimately relies on formal approval of the local school authorities. This may help explain the resistance from school staff.

However, this resistance was also contributed to by the practical challenges that integrating community services into the school building created for school staff. Stakeholders felt that a lack of preparation and shared education about one another's roles and professional perspectives and practices prior to the implementation of the initiative exacerbated issues around differing legal obligations and behavioural expectations. As Dryfoos (2005) noted, the community service workers and educational staff that partner to provide services in models of integrated student supports are typically ensconced within distinct silos. Bridging these domains to build common understanding around perspectives on youth and child development, behavioural management, and educational practice can strengthen these partnerships. This may be achieved through shared training and education for both agency and school staff prior to and throughout the implementation of an initiative (Dryfoos, 2005). Interdisciplinary education for new teachers and community service workers represents another avenue for improving integration (Dryfoos, 2002). Pre-service teachers may benefit from courses in child and family development, while schools of social work and psychology may include discussion of educational issues in their curricula.

As the differences between the school sites illustrate, implementing models of integrated students supports often results in structures and processes that vary across schools and districts (Eber & Nelson, 1997). While several basic features emerged as important, program developers

should ensure relevance to communities by building on their unique strengths and addressing their needs (Eber & Nelson, 1997). Agency staff must be open to learning the culture of the school, and exploring ways that their work can complement the school's priorities (Dryfoos, 2002). However, critics attuned to these power dynamics have cautioned against school-based partnerships being co-opted by school personnel if the needs of the school system become a greater influence on the program than the needs of the students (McMahon et al., 2000). If, in adapting the initiative to the needs and expectations of the school community, the focus on addressing the root causes of the systemic problems affecting students and families is lost, the initiative's potential to address the causes and consequences of poverty may also be compromised (McMahon et al., 2000).

Systems Change

With systems change identified as one of the core principles underlying *AIFY*, this study also sought to explore program decision makers' perspectives around influencing the integration between the education and community services sectors on a broader, long-term scale. According to the theoretical and empirical literature, adopting a systems change approach can create a more supportive context for initiative implementation and sustainability (Hopkins et al., 2014; Sanders, 2014). This was reflected in the conversations with the operational and steering partners, who felt that without changing provincial government and school board policies and decisions around resource allocation, *AIFY* would not be scalable or sustainable over the long-term.

The importance of engaging leaders at different levels of a system has been identified in other studies, with Sanders (2014) stating that promoting lasting change to schools requires consistent and congruent support from those at local, regional, and provincial levels. The efforts

to integrate schools and community services described in this thesis represent influences at the inner levels of Kozleski and Smith's (2009) systems change framework, across the levels of students, practitioners, and schools. *All in for Youth* created new relationships between students and practitioners in the schools, introducing new teams of community services professionals who brought different perspectives to working with students, families, teachers, and administrators. The program also contributed to changes in how schools used and distributed resources and structured their time, introducing new processes for interprofessional collaboration and service delivery.

Cultivating a supportive context for initiative implementation and sustainability involves making strategic choices about the levels of change that have the greatest likelihood of impacting an initiative's success (Kozleski & Smith, 2009). The conversations with the operational and steering partners highlighted the need to bring the processes and policies at the higher levels of Kozleski and Smith's framework, particularly school districts/boards and provincial government, into greater alignment with the changes that had already begun at the school, practitioner, and student levels. Building alignment between policies and resources across levels of the educational and social sectors, from schools to school boards and provincial government ministries, were identified as crucial to influencing systems change.

The operational and steering partners' emphasis on requiring evidence of program impact to generate support from those at the upper levels of the systems they were working to influence reflect the growing pressures on organizations to demonstrate their impact to those controlling resources (Arvidson & Lyon, 2014). The challenges the partners described around demonstrating program impact are symptomatic of the current climate where, to guard against using scarce resources to support ineffective programs, government agencies and other funding bodies

increasingly require evidence of impact (Fels Smyth & Schorr, 2009). However, this has contributed to a paradoxical situation where programs with ambitious, long-term objectives are expected to demonstrate impacts in an inadequate period of time, in order to acquire the support necessary to sustain the program long enough to actually observe the intended objectives (McMahon et al., 2000). Changes in outcomes are often only possible by providing effective services to multiple cohorts of children and youth over several years (Greenberg, 2004). While stakeholders in the current study attempted to address this challenge by generating evidence of short-term outcomes and building the program on an evidence base of approaches with demonstrated success in other contexts, working with the political context emerged as especially important. Indeed, McMahon et al. (2000) claim that "more than anything else, efforts to cultivate effective interagency collaboratives will highlight the extent to which political considerations can hinder their development" (p. 69).

Although most of the operational and steering partners believed that evidence was a key factor for influencing systems change, at least one noted that without engagement with the greater political context, evidence is generally insufficient on its own. This perspective is reinforced by those studying policy change, who have noted that evidence can be a relatively minor contributor among the multitude of factors that influence policy decisions (Minkler & Freudenberg, 2010). The policy literature consistently identifies the importance of contextual factors, such as economic pressures, political trends and leadership, and public attitudes (Cacari-Stone, Wallerstein, Garcia, & Minkler, 2014). The confluence of these contextual factors contributes to 'windows of opportunity', where attempts to influence changes to systems may have greater chances of success. In the current study, the political context was perceived as supportive of *AIFY*, with the municipal, provincial, and federal government aligned in their

vision around poverty reduction. In this context, evidence demonstrating the program's impacts on poverty might be more influential because it supports government priorities. However, the volatile nature of political priorities also means that initiatives are susceptible to changes in political readiness that could derail systems change efforts.

Furthermore, the discourses around the need for evidence of impact are embedded in social, cultural and political contexts (Harris & Adams, 2016). In the literature review at the beginning of this thesis, I provided a brief overview of some of the methodological issues encountered in evaluating integrated student supports. While the limits of different methods for measuring the impacts of complex, community-based initiatives are well known among researchers, many funding organizations privilege methods that may not be appropriate in these contexts (whether for practical, ethical, or epistemological reasons; Roche & Kelly, 2012). In some cases, impact evaluation has been defined in explicitly quantitative language, relying on comparisons between participants randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Some authors have argued that decisions about the types of evidence that are privileged are inherently political decisions driven by political pressures that can disadvantage certain groups (Roche & Kelly, 2012). To better position themselves to influence systems change, partners must recognize that discourses around evidence of impact are framed by certain stakeholders (Brolin, 2017). As was reflected in the interviews with the operational and steering partners, collaboratives need to develop a shared understanding of the evidence required by different stakeholders. But perhaps even more, they need to develop relationships between those stakeholders who have power in the systems they are working to influence, reframing evidence generation as a collaborative process between program developers and funders, rather than an isolated transaction (Campbell, 2002).

Strategic political relationships may have greater influence than research evidence on

achieving the policy changes that underlie systemic change (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014; Speer & Christens, 2013). Having individuals in leadership positions from the school boards and provincial government represented on the steering committee was recognized as a strength of *AIFY*. Establishing strong networks of stakeholders with influence over the various levels of a system may aid in building the alignment between processes, policies, and resources needed to support initiatives that aim to change the fundamental ways that certain sectors interact (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014; Speer & Christens, 2013). Without considering political context and relationships in determining the types of evidence that are valued by decision-makers and ultimately used to inform decisions about policies and resource allocation, integrated student support initiatives may be constrained in their efforts to influence systems change.

Implications and Significance

In recognition of the CBPE study from which the data used in this thesis originated, I begin with the relevance of this research to the *AIFY* partnership. The importance of reflecting on and learning from the challenges and successes experienced over the first year of the initiative to guide intentionality around practice in subsequent years of implementation emerged strongly in the interviews conducted with the operational and steering partners. These findings may guide program adaptation and improvement at the 5 demonstration schools, in addition to decisions about whether and how the program is implemented at other schools in the school districts (Eber et al., 2010). Furthermore, findings pertaining to systems change may serve as a foundation for discussions around strategies for working across levels to influence the ways that the education and community services sector interact on a wider scale. As the initial 3-year commitment to the program comes to an end, influencing policies and decisions about resource allocation will be essential to facilitate program sustainability over the long-term.

More generally, this study addresses a gap in the existing literature around detailed analysis of barriers to implementation and characteristics that support the integration of schools and community services (McMahon et al., 2000; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Research on the characteristics that facilitate and hinder connections between schools and community agencies are relevant to both policy and practice (Sanders, 2001), especially as more schools adopt models of integrated student supports (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Min et al., 2017). A greater understanding of the process of integrating schools and community services will help future practitioners and researchers to develop and implement these approaches more effectively in different contexts, and contribute to better outcomes for students' learning and well-being (Coldiron et al., 2017; McMahon et al., 2000; Sanders, 2001). With a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges inherent in integration, and how integrated student support initiatives can contribute to systems change, other schools, communities, and governments may be better prepared for and receptive to implementing these types of models (McMahon et al., 2000). Other sectors working towards integrated supports and collaborative practice, including the mental health system and early learning sector, may also benefit from these findings.

This study makes a unique contribution to the literature due to its investigation of a community-school partnership approach employing the wraparound process in a Canadian context. Due to varying institutional, cultural, and social conditions, different countries provide different contexts for integrated student supports (Heers et al., 2016). This study contributes a Canadian perspective, which remains underrepresented in the literature. Furthermore, few comprehensive models of integrated student supports have been the subject of empirical research, with most studies focusing on initiatives involving the co-location of 1 or 2 types of services (Bartlett, 2015; Grossman & Vang, 2009). The comprehensive wraparound approach

implemented by *AIFY* provides a unique opportunity to explore the integration of a range of services within the context of school-community partnerships supported by the collaboration of 11 community partners.

Limitations

Several limitations influence the trustworthiness of these findings. First, this study describes an initiative implemented in 5 schools serving students with complex needs in a single Western Canadian city. While the findings contained in this thesis may have implications for the development and implementation of integrated student supports in other contexts, practitioners and researchers should exercise caution in translating these findings to communities that differ in fundamental ways from those who contributed the data from which these inferences are made. For example, schools located in more affluent neighbourhoods may serve different populations of students and families and have different needs and resources. In these communities, the full-time availability of agency staff may not be as essential to the integration of schools and community services as in an inner-city school dealing with frequent crises.

Second, some stakeholder groups, specifically school staff, may not be adequately represented in the findings. While, in the original evaluation study that contributed the data for this thesis, most of the agency staff, agency leaders, school administrators, operational partners, and steering partners involved in *AIFY* across the 5 schools participated in a focus group or interview, only a small portion of school staff were interviewed. Other school staff may hold perspectives that differ from those of the staff who participated in the interviews and focus groups. Consequently, I may have constructed different themes had those perspectives been included in the dataset. In addition, while the credibility of this study is enhanced through triangulation across multiple sources of data by integrating the perspectives of several different

stakeholder groups, it is limited by the use of a single method of data collection (Fusch et al., 2015). The analysis draws exclusively on stakeholder perspectives derived from interviews and focus groups, thus lacking methodological triangulation.

Specific to the use of secondary data in this study, the depth of these findings may be limited by the fact that I was unable to engage in the iterative process of data collection and analysis that typically characterizes qualitative research (Heaton, 2004). My analysis was confined by the limits of the existing data, with no opportunity to probe participants further or follow up about emerging issues or questions. As a result, certain areas of the analysis may be less well saturated than others (Heaton, 2004).

Suggestions for Future Research

This study has identified several avenues for future research to explore in greater depth, many of which correspond with questions raised by other researchers. First, how can the objectives and mandates of schools and community service agencies be reconciled? In the interviews and focus groups with stakeholders involved in this study, learning and addressing the underlying issues that can interfere with learning were often conceptualized as competing goals that required ongoing negotiation, compromise, and trade-offs. McMahon et al. (2000) articulate this common challenge by inquiring "when students need to learn at the same time they need support services to address issues interfering with learning, how do structures and protocols for working together ensure that students receive both" (p. 82)?

Secondly, this study has raised questions around how to involve teachers and school staff as more than mere referral agents, but as active partners in the wraparound process (McMahon et al., 2000). In the current study, teacher involvement emerged as a characteristic underlying integration. However, the extent of teacher involvement differed among schools, and schools

employed different processes to encourage teacher engagement in decision-making around supporting students. While the structures and processes underlying teacher involvement are likely to be highly contextual, determined by a combination of factors including school culture, administrator support, and teacher buy-in, time, and perspectives, an exploration of different approaches may help identify the opportunities and challenges associated with each, and the models best matched to certain school characteristics.

Finally, the literature would be enriched by further exploration of the factors that influence the sustainability of integrated student supports. Specifically, the emphasis that stakeholders in the present study placed on generating evidence of impact in order to influence systems change around how student supports are delivered raises the question of whether effective outcomes for children, youth, and families really do influence program sustainability (Greenberg, 2004). Additionally, studies might explore the policies that can be implemented at various levels of the system encompassing integrated student supports (e.g., schools, school districts/boards, provincial government) to cultivate a context amenable to program sustainability.

Conclusion

While the integration of schools and community services may hold potential for addressing the causes and implications of poverty, if school reforms are to contribute to meaningful, far-reaching, and lasting change for students and families, stakeholders across levels of the education and community services sectors must work collaboratively to build support for initiatives and contribute to their sustainability (Hopkins et al., 2014; Sanders, 2014). Despite growing enthusiasm about integrated student supports, efforts to integrate the education and community services sectors are constrained by conceptual, fiscal, legal, ethical, and practical

issues (McMahon et al., 2000). Reflected in the importance of adapting program implementation to the unique context of each school, scaling up complex initiatives can require systemic reform emphasizing innovation and flexibility, rather than replication (Kozleski & Smith, 2009). While there is no universal 'best' approach to integrating schools and community services, the characteristics outlined here may serve as a general framework to guide program implementation when informed by an assessment of local context.

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Appendix A

School Staff Focus Group Guide

Hello my name is _____. For this focus group we are interested in hearing from you as school staff (teachers/education assistants/other) about your school and how it supports the students and families in the school community.

Just a quick reminder, specific things shared in this focus group should not be shared with people not part of this focus group. People here may choose to share some things with the group that they would like to be kept confidential and, while we cannot guarantee this, we do ask that other group participants keep the details discussed here confidential. We appreciate your help with this.

So thank you all for being here – we are very interested in what you have to say! To we start, let's go around and have person say their name and your role in the school?

Firstly, we want to talk about your school community.

1. **Tell me about the school. What is the school community like?**
    a. What do you like most about working at your school?
    b. What makes you most proud about your school community and the people in it?

Now we want to touch on some of the challenges that you see students and families encounter in and out of school, and that you encounter in your work at the school.

2. **What are some of the challenges faced by students and families that are part of your school community?**
    a. School challenges?
    b. Home challenges?

3. **What are some of the most common challenges you encounter when working with students and families?**

Next, we want to talk about some of the supports that your school offers.

4. **What are some of the supports offered in your school?**
    a. How do these supports help students/families overcome challenges?
    b. How have these supports made an impact on the lives of students and families?
        i. Any positive changes you have noticed?
        ii. Any noticeable differences in the school community?
    c. Are there any student or family needs that you feel are not addressed with the current support services in place?

d. (*For Teachers/EAs):* what supports or services need to be in place to help you do your job more effectively?

5. **Why are school-based supports important to the wellbeing of students and families in the school community?**

Lastly we want to touch on collaborative approaches for offering support services.

6. **What do you think about using a collaborative work approach for offering wraparound supports in schools?**
    a. Advantages of this approach?
    b. Disadvantages? Challenges?
    c. What experiences do you have working collaboratively to provide support to students?

Thank you again for talking with us today. You opinions and perspectives are very important to this project. This helps us get a better understanding of ways these schools are or are not supporting the students and families that are part of the school communities.

Appendix B

School Administrators Focus Group Guide

Hello, my name is _____ and we are here today to ask you about All in for Youth. For this focus group we are interested in hearing from you as demo school administrators (e.g., principals, assistant principals) about your schools and how they support the students and families in the school communities.

Before we begin, just a quick reminder, specific things shared in this focus group should not be shared with people not part of this focus group. People here may choose to share some things with the group that they would like to be kept confidential and, while we cannot guarantee this, we do ask that other group participants keep the details discussed here confidential. We appreciate your help with this.

So thank you all for being here – we are very interested in what you have to say! Before we start, please introduce yourself - what's your name, your school's name, and your role?

To start, we want to talk about your school community.

1. **Tell me about your schools. What is the school culture like and what are unique aspects about this school compared to other schools in Edmonton?**
    a. What makes you most proud about your school community and the people in it?

Now we want to touch on some of the challenges that you see students and families encounter in and out of school, and that you encounter in your work at the school.

2. **What are some of the challenges faced by students and families that are part of this school community?**
    a. School challenges?
    b. Home challenges?

Next, we want to talk about some of the supports that your school offers.

3. **How are students and families supported with these challenges?**
    a. What are some other ways you help support students or families?
    b. Are there any supports not offered that perhaps should be?

4. **What are some ways your schools have changed since the wraparound supports have been a part of your school?**
    a. Differences in interactions between students, families, teachers, support workers?
    b. Differences in family involvement?

5. **What are ways you believe the All In for Youth initiative is impacting the lives of the students and families that are part of the school community?**

a. Positive impacts? Things that are working well?
b. Any changes needed?
c. Biggest changes/differences seen in the wellbeing of students/families? School cultures? Staff?

6. **Why are school-based supports important to the wellbeing of students and family in the school community?**

Lastly we want to touch on the collaborative approach that guides All In for Youth and its impact on school communities.

7. **What do you think about the collaborative work approach that has been taken to guide the All In for Youth Initiative across different levels of operations?**
    a. Advantages of this approach?
    b. Disadvantages? Challenges?
    c. Describe your experiences with the All In for Youth collaborative approach to service delivery.
        i. Things you have learned from being part of this collaborative work approach?

8. **What do you think it would take to convince others in power (e.g., funders, policy makers, etc.) to support the implementation of this type of model in school communities?**

Thank you again for talking with us today. You opinions and perspectives are very important to this project. This helps us get a better understanding of ways these schools are or are not supporting the students and families that are part of the school communities.

Appendix C

Agency Staff Focus Group Guide

Hello, my name is _____ and we are here to talk with you about All In for Youth initiative. For this focus group we are interested in hearing from you as agency staff providing supports and services in the 5 demo schools. We are interested in hearing your perspectives about the experiences that students and families have with the schools and the supports offered, as well as your experiences working in collaboration with other agencies for this initiative. In your responses, please consider your work only with the 5 demo schools.

Just a quick reminder, specific things shared in this focus group should not be shared with people not part of this focus group. People here may choose to share some things with the group that they would like to be kept confidential and, while we cannot guarantee this, we do ask that other group participants keep the details discussed here confidential. We appreciate your help with this.

So thank you all for being here – we are very interested in what you have to say! To start, please introduce yourself – what's your name, the agency you work for, and your role within the school(s)?

Firstly, we want to talk more about your role within the schools and your relationships with students and staff.

1. **Describe how you have been involved in the All In for Youth initiative currently being used in the demo schools.**
    a. What do you do in your role as a service provider?

2. **Describe the school community/culture where you provide supports and/or services?**
    a. Tell us about the relationships you have with the students and families you work with.
    b. Tell us about your relationships with school staff.

Now we want to touch on some of the challenges that you see students and families encounter in and out of school, and that you encounter in your work.

3. **What are some of the challenges faced by students and families that are part of the All In initiative in schools?**
    a. School challenges?
    b. Home challenges?

4. **What are some of the most common challenges you encounter when working with students and families, and/or school staff?**

Next, we want to talk about some of the supports that the AIFY initiative offers.

5. **How do you support students or families with these challenges?**
    a. What are some other ways you help support students or families?
    b. Are there any supports not offered that perhaps should be?

6. **Why is your work important to the wellbeing of students and families in the school community?**

Lastly we want to touch on the collaborative approach that guides All In for Youth and its impact on school communities.

7. **What are ways you believe the All In for Youth program is impacting the lives of the students and families that are part of the school community?**
    a. Positive impacts? What is working well?
    b. Changes needed for the program?
    c. Biggest changes seen in students, families, schools?

8. **Thinking about the collaborative work approach that is part of the All In for Youth Initiative, what are your impressions on how this approach is working?**
    a. Advantages of this approach?
    b. Challenges/difficulties experienced with this approach?
    c. Things you have learned from being part of this collaborative work?

(Optional – if there is time)

9. **What do you think it would take to convince others in power (e.g., funders, policy makers, etc.) to support the implementation of this type of model in school communities?**

Thank you again for talking with us today. You opinions and perspectives are very important to this project. This helps us get a better understanding of ways these schools are or are not supporting the students and families that are part of the school communities.

Appendix D

Agency Leaders Focus Group Guide

Hello, my name is _____ and we are here talk with you about All In for Youth. We are interested in hearing from you as agency leaders who organize/provide supports and services in the 5 demo schools. We would like to hear about your agency's work to support this initiative, and your experiences collaborating with other agencies.

Just a quick reminder, specific things shared in this focus group should not be shared with people not part of this focus group. People here may choose to share some things with the group that they would like to be kept confidential and, while we cannot guarantee this, we do ask that other group participants keep the details discussed here confidential. We appreciate your help with this.

So thank you all for being here – we are very interested in what you have to say! To start, please introduce yourself – what's your name, the agency you work for, and your role?
Firstly, we want to talk about your agency's role within the schools and relationships between students and staff.

1. **How does your agency support students or families in need in the 5 demo schools?**
    a. Your agency's role?
    b. How are relationships between the agency staff and students/families?
    c. Why are these relationships important for the effectiveness of the agency's work?

Now we want to touch on some challenges experienced by students and families, and by agency staff in their work.

2. **What are some of the challenges faced by students and families in these schools?**
    a. School challenges?
    b. Home challenges?
3. **What are some of the most common challenges your staff encounter when working with students and families?**

Next, we want to talk about some of the supports that the AIFY initiative offers.

4. **How does the AIFY initiative support students and families with these challenges?**
    a. What are some other ways you help support students or families?
    b. Are there any supports not offered that perhaps should be?

5. **Why is your agency's work important to the wellbeing of students and families in the school community?**

Lastly we want to touch on the collaborative approach that guides All In for Youth and its impact on school communities.

6. **What are ways you believe the All In for Youth initiative is impacting the lives of the students and families that are part of the school community?**
    a. Positive impacts? Things that are working well?
    b. Any changes needed?
    c. Biggest changes/differences seen in the wellbeing of students/families? School cultures? Staff?

7. **What do you think about the collaborative approach that has been taken to guide the operations of the All In for Youth Initiative?**
    a. Advantages of this approach?
    b. Disadvantages? Challenges?
    c. Things you have learned from being part of this collaborative work approach?

8. **What do you think it would take to convince others in power (e.g., funders, policy makers, etc.) to support the implementation of this type of model in school communities?**

Thank you again for talking with us today. You opinions and perspectives are very important to this project. This helps us get a better understanding of ways these schools are or are not supporting the students and families that are part of the school communities.

Appendix E

Operational Committee Partner Interview Guide

Hello, my name is _____, and we are here to talk about All in for Youth. For this interview we are interested in hearing from you as an Operational Committee member about the All In for Youth Initiative and the collaborative work that has gone into this initiative. Before we start, we just want to remind you that everything we talk about today will be kept confidential, and none of your personal or identifying information will be used in our research material. You are also free to skip or choose not to answer any of the questions.

To start, we'd like to talk about your role within the All in for Youth Initiative.

1. **How would you describe your role as an All In operational committee member?**
    a. How are you connected to schools?

Now we want discuss the collaborative approach that guides All In for Youth.

2. **What do you think about the collaborative work approach that has been taken to guide the All In for Youth initiative across different levels of operations (e.g., in the operational committee, in the front-line staff, etc.)?**
    a. Advantages of this approach?
    b. Disadvantages? Challenges?
    c. What have you learned from being part of this collaborative work approach?

3. **What has your experience as an operational committee member working in collaboration with other partners been like?**
    a. Successes?
    b. Challenges?

Now we want to talk about the AIFY initiative and its model of service delivery.

4. **How is the All In for Youth initiative a different approach to service delivery of programs and supports for students and families compared to what has been offered in the past?**
    a. Benefits of this approach over previous service delivery models?
    b. What made you 'buy-in' to being a partner in this initiative?

5. **What do you think it would take to convince others in power (e.g., funders, policy makers, etc.) that this type of support model best serves students and families in vulnerable communities?**
    a. What would it take for them to 'buy-in'?

Next, we want to talk about some of the initial impacts of the initiative.

6. **What are some initial impacts of the All In for Youth Initiative that you have seen or heard about so far?**
    a. Impacts on students?
    b. Impacts on families?
    c. Impacts on schools?

7. **Looking at impacts on your own organization/agency, how has participating in this partnership affected your organization's/agency's knowledge about evaluation?**
    a. What have you learned about evaluation? How might this influence your organization's work going forwards?
    b. How has your understanding of the importance or purpose of evaluation changed?
    c. What are some of the benefits you see for building your organization's/agency's capacity to conduct evaluations, or to use information created out of evaluations?

Appendix F

Steering Committee Partner Interview Guide

Hi my name is _____ and we are here today to talk about All In for Youth. For this interview we are interested in hearing from you as a Steering Committee member about the All In for Youth Initiative and the collaborative work that has gone into this initiative. Before we start, we just want to remind you that everything we talk about today will be kept confidential, and none of your personal or identifying information will be used in our research material. You are also free to skip or choose not to answer any of the questions.

To start, we'd like to talk about your role within the All in for Youth Initiative.

1. **How would you describe your role as an All In steering committee member?**
    a. How are you connected to schools?

Now we want discuss the collaborative approach that guides All In for Youth.

2. **What do you think about the collaborative work approach that has been taken to guide the All In for Youth Initiative across different levels of operations (e.g., for operational planning, among agency staff, etc.)?**
    a. Advantages of this approach?
    b. Disadvantages? Challenges?
    c. What have you learned from being part of this collaborative work approach?

3. **What has your experience as a steering committee member working in collaboration with other partners been like?**
    a. Successes?
    b. Challenges?

Now we want to talk about the AIFY initiative and its model of service delivery.

4. **How is the All In for Youth initiative a different approach to service delivery of programs and supports for students and families compared to what has been offered in the past?**
    a. Benefits of this approach over previous service delivery models?
    b. What made you 'buy-in' to being a partner in this initiative?

5. **What do you think it would take to convince others in power (e.g., funders, policy makers, etc.) that this type of support model best serves students and families in vulnerable communities?**
    a. What would it take for them to 'buy-in'?

Next, we want to talk about some of the initial impacts of the initiative.

6. **What are some impacts of the All In for Youth Initiative that you have seen or heard about so far?**
    a. Impacts on students?
    b. Impacts on families?
    c. Impacts on schools?

7. **Looking at impacts on your own organization/agency, how has participating in this partnership affected your organization's/agency's knowledge about evaluation?**
    a. What have you learned about evaluation? How might this influence your organization's work going forwards?
    b. How has your understanding of the importance or purpose of evaluation changed?
    c. What are some of the benefits you see for building your organization's/agency's capacity to conduct evaluations, or to use information created out of evaluations?