Achievement Gap Cannot be Closed Without First Reducing the Opportunity Gap:
A Case Study of Model Schools for Inner Cities

2013 AERA - Education & Poverty:
Theory, Research, Policy and Praxis

San Francisco

Paper Presentation

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Model Schools for inner cities

Toronto District School Board

Toronto District School Board
www.tdsb.on.ca

- Largest school board in Canada
- Serving over 256,000 students in nearly 600 schools (2011-2012)
- Diverse student population in one of world's most diverse cities (175 countries and over 100 languages)
- TDSB schools reflect a range of social and economic needs: from the most affluent to the most disadvantaged

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TDSB's Equity Mandate

The Board is … committed to ensuring that fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles of our school system and are integrated into all our policies, programs, operations, and practices.

That is,
to ensure equity of success for all students regardless of background

TDSB Research Division has been instrumental in helping the Board meet its equity agenda

Applied Research

- **Needs assessment** (to identify needs, gaps, barriers, etc.)
- **Formative data** (to inform practices)
- **Summative results** (for accountability purposes)

At All Levels

- **System/ Region**
- **School**
- **Program**

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TDSB Learning Opportunity Index (LOI)

- The Board's Research is responsible for producing a LOI, which ranks each TDSB school based on measures of **external challenges** (not achievement)
- 6 variables were identified as external factors that impact educational achievement:
  - Median Income
  - Percentage of Families whose income is below the Low Income Measure (before tax)
  - Percentage of Families Receiving Social Assistance
  - Adults with Low Education
  - Adults with University Degrees
  - Lone-Parent Families
- The above variables were based on tax returns and Federal Census data, which were linked with individual students' postal codes from each school.
- Principal Components Analysis was used to derive a single index ranking all TDSB schools – elementary and secondary separately.
- The LOI is recalculated every two years, using a rolling three-year average of data for each of the variables in the index

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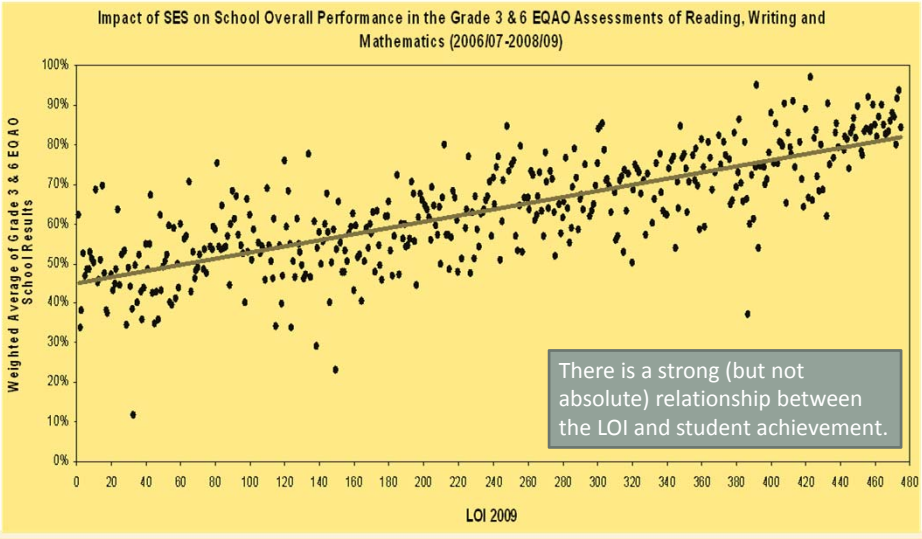
Achievement Gap & LOI



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Aside from SES and achievement,
the TDSB would like to know
what other factors, conditions, or barriers
may inhibit achievement among its students.

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In 2006, for the first time since its amalgamation, the Board conducted its very 1st system-wide Census

TDSB Census collected data on:

- Student demographic characteristics

as well as

- Student in-school experience
- Experience outside of school
- Home support
- Post-secondary aspirations
- Self perceived abilities
- Physical health
- Social emotional well-being (in the 2011-2012 Census)

Student & Parent Voices

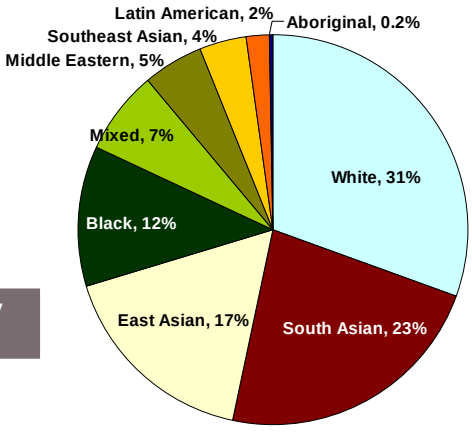
Some Sample Findings

from the first

Student and Parent Census

Student Racial Background (JK-Gr.12)

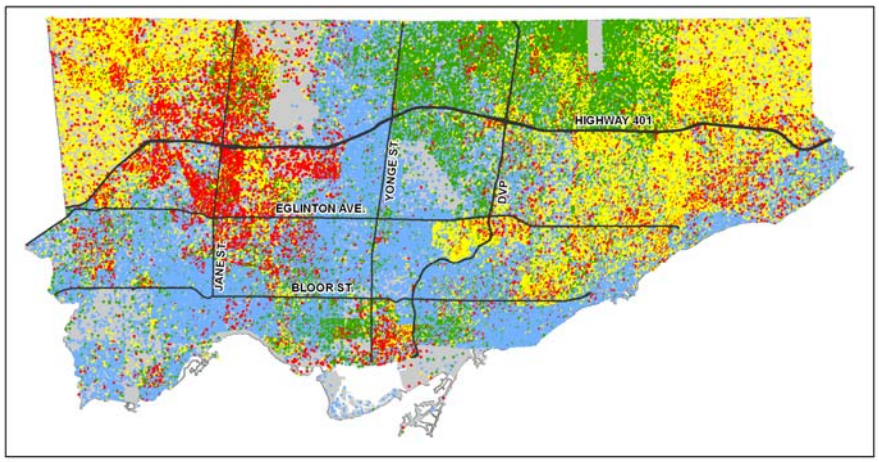
(2006 Student Census & 2008 Parent Census)



Not captured by SIS in Canada

TDSB Student Population by Ethno-racial Background

(2012 Parent Census: Kindergarten to Grade 12)



Date: 13/03/2013

TDSB Student Population

1 Dot = 1 Student

Black

East Asian

South Asian

White

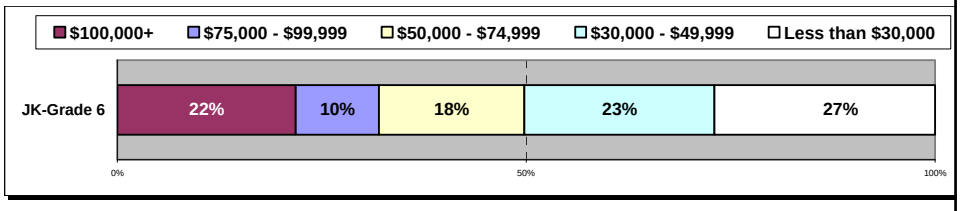
Major Road

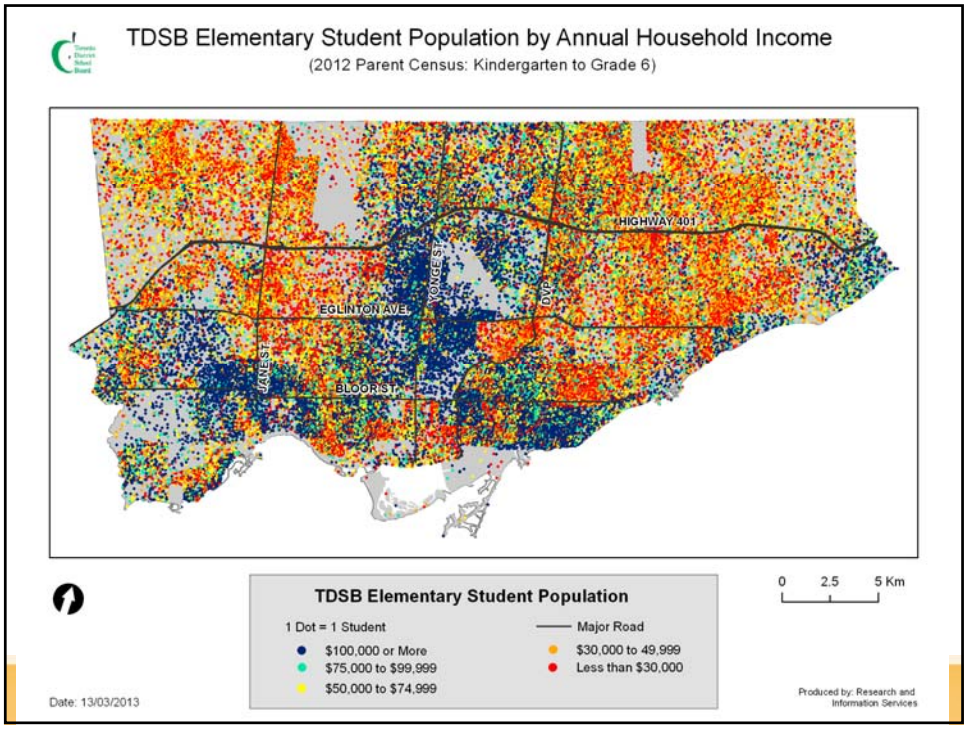
0 2.5 5 Km

Produced by: Research and Information Services
Sources: TDSB Facilities Planning

Family Income

(2008 Parent Census, JK-Gr.6)





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Detailed analysis of Census data further reveals: Wide *Opportunity* Gaps Outside of School by SES

For example:

- Pre-school experience
- After-school activities – e.g. sports/recreational activities vs. screen activities
- Physical Health – e.g., daily breakfast/lunch, vision and hearing assessments, etc.
- Home support – e.g., parent engagement in school
- Self-perceived abilities – e.g., leadership skills

Toronto District School Board
TDSB CRITICAL CHALLENGES
• Closing achievement gaps for diverse groups
• Addressing the impact of poverty on achievement
• Providing cultural proficiency training for all employees
• Partnerships with parents and communities

Toronto District School Board
MODEL SCHOOLS FOR INNER CITIES (MSIC) PROGRAM
Model Schools for inner cities
In 2006, the Board launched its MSIC program as *one* of the key system initiatives to address the challenges, esp. in terms of meeting the needs of students who are disadvantaged by family poverty, unemployment and insecure housing.

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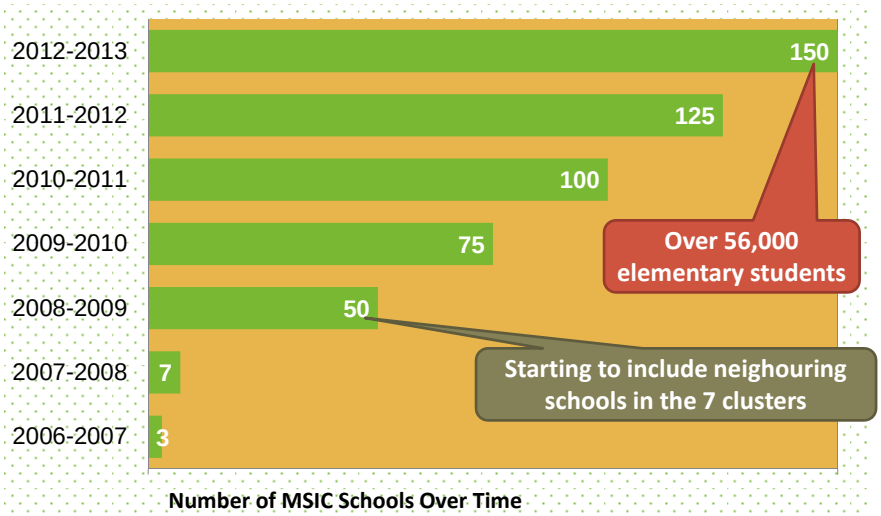
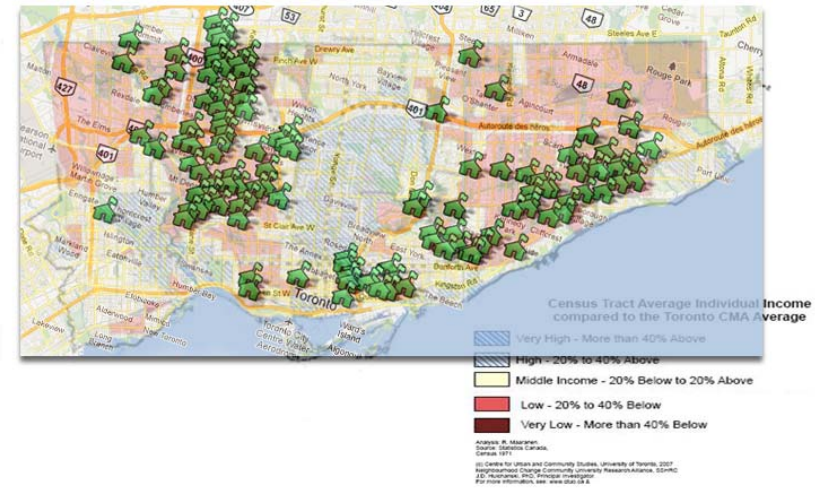
History of MSIC



Model Schools for Inner Cities 18

MODEL/CLUSTER SCHOOLS ACROSS THE CITY, 2013



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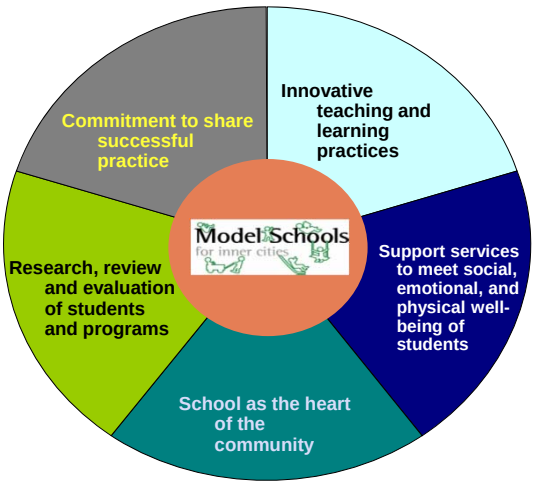
Model Schools for Inner City:

5 Essential Components



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Model School Structure

157 Schools grouped into 8 Clusters

Clusters: A1, A2, B3, C4, D5, E7, F6, Secondary

Centrally – MSIC Office headed by a Central Coordinating Principal

Each Cluster receives extra resources – i.e., extra funding and staffing support – e.g.,

- ✓ One Lead Teacher
- ✓ Two Teaching and Learning Coaches
- ✓ Three Community Support Workers

A top-down and bottom-up approach

Research: one of the 5 MSIC Essential Components

A multi-year MSIC's Research and Review Plan for all MSIC schools to evaluate, monitor and review progress based on the following research methodologies:

- Multiple outcome areas – for students, staff, parents, schools and the local and broader communities
- Multiple measures – both quantitative and qualitative
- Multiple data sources
- Multi-year longitudinal tracking – to monitor growth over time

MSIC research for two important purposes

1. Formative: *for continuous school improvement*
   - ❖ to provide regular feedback and information for school administrators and staff to help:
     - identify ongoing needs of students
     - monitor students' performance and school progress
     - focus school efforts and re-align directions where necessary

2. Summative: *for accountability*
   - ❖ to assess the overall long-term impact on student and school performance as a whole for all stakeholders

Formative data for individual MSIC schools

1. Annual interim school reports are produced by the Research Department and distributed to school principals.
2. PDs are offered on how to unpack and use the data to identify student needs and to inform planning and programming at the local school and cluster levels.

One school called their current practice "3-Ds"

i.e., "Data Driven Decision-making"

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What were the summative findings

Based on:

- Quantitative and qualitative data collected over several school years
- Longitudinal tracking of student cohorts over time – e.g. value-added assessment
- Separate evaluative studies of special MSIC programs

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SUMMATIVE FINDINGS (1):

Reducing Opportunity Gaps

- **Basic needs of students are met** – e.g., breakfast programs, enriched and extended after-school activities, vision and hearing tests, free eye glasses, and in-school health clinics
- **Students do and feel better physically, socially and emotionally** – e.g., less complaints about headaches or stomach aches, better vision, less absenteeism due to physical ailments, higher resiliency, better behaviours in school
- **Parents are more involved in the school** - e.g., higher attendance in teacher interviews, school meetings and events, higher satisfaction
- **More community partnerships are developed to support students** - e.g., Gift of Sight & Sound; Beyond 3:30; MSPHI, etc.

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SUMMATIVE FINDINGS (2):

Narrowing the Achievement Gap

- **Kindergarten students are more prepared for Grade 1** – e.g., increase in EDI scores from 2008 to 2011
- **Students enjoy school better** – based on two rounds of Census results (2006-2008 vs. 2011-2012); MSIC student perception surveys
- **Staff have received more training (in CRRP and social justice curriculum) and leadership experience** – based on yearly staff surveys over time
- **Students' reading, writing and math skills have improved** – based on cohort tracking of standardized test results (CAT4) over time

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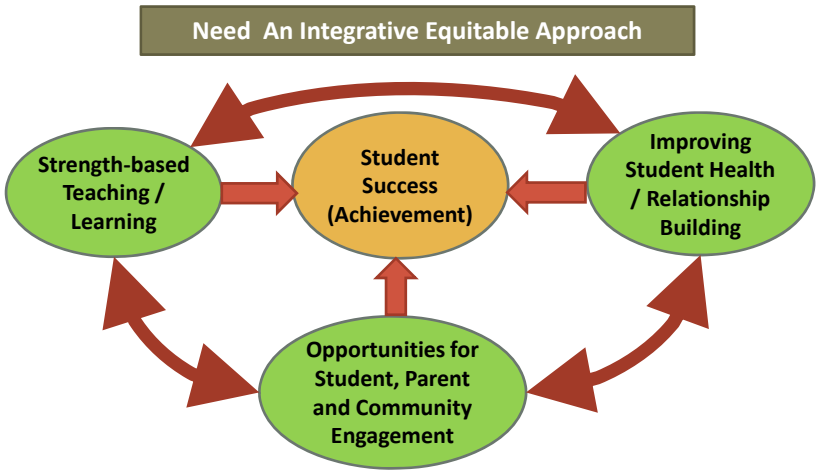
What Have We Learned



Required Conditions (1)

All high needs schools - no matter how challenging – can bring about change, and can close the achievement gap as long as the school has (or is given):

1. Solid additional support and resources to level the playing field (to fill the opportunities gaps).
2. Extra efforts (innovative and intensive interventions) to make up the initial achievement gaps

No single program can make a sustainable difference; it's the collective and holistic efforts that make the change real and long-term

Required Conditions (2)

3. Relevant <u>research</u> and review information to help monitor progress, to inform programming and planning, and to adjust practices where necessary
4. Sufficient <u>time</u> for school and students to demonstrate growth – the more challenging the school the longer the time is needed.
5. Visionary <u>leadership + staff</u> support and commitment at <u>both</u> the school and system levels.
6. <u>*Continuous* efforts</u> and resources to cope with the ongoing or changing (often unpredictable or uncontrollable) external and internal challenges.

Final Remarks

All the six conditions are important:

not only for closing the gap,

but also for keeping the gap from widening again

in our inner city schools

Thank You!

Title: Leading with Research and Data: A Case Study of Model Schools for Inner Cities

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