all in for youth
United for school completion.

SUPPORTING CULTURE CHANGE AT
BISHOP MCNALLY HIGH SCHOOL

United Way
Calgary and Area
Building a great city for all.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All In for Youth (AIFY) is a five-year, city-wide initiative to support youth in successfully completing high school. Developed by United Way of Calgary and Area, AIFY's broad strategies include removing barriers to academic and personal success, connecting youth to positive adults, and linking youth to further education and career paths. The collaborative involves the participation of both Calgary school boards, 20 Calgary high schools, a number of local companies like Devon, Fluor and Imperial, and youth-serving agencies (e.g. YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary, Big Brothers Big Sisters).

In Fall 2015, AIFY conducted a case study of Bishop McNally High School (McNally) in Calgary, the first high school to join the initiative, beginning in the 2012-13 school year. For many years, McNally had the lowest high school completion rate in the Calgary Catholic School District, but recently has seen significant progress, achieving a 79.4% completion rate in the 2014-15 school year, up from 69.4% the previous year. *The objective of the research was to investigate the ways in which AIFY has contributed to a shift in school culture at McNally that supported this success.*

McNally is part of Alberta Education's Moving Forward with High School Redesign (HSR) program, which aims to shift school culture, pedagogy and leadership to transform the high school experience for students. A core principle of HSR is flexibility, creating learning environments that support personalized learning and the development of meaningful relationships. The school's vision is that success looks different for every student, and thus their paths to success will look different. *AIFY was influential in co-creating this vision of student success,* in particular through learning from the Call Back program.

KEY IMPACTS OF AIFY AT BISHOP MCNALLY

1. *Students are more successful,* for example through increased course completion, increased attendance, higher confidence levels, and graduation.
2. *Staff have greater awareness of student barriers* through an increased willingness to help students manage their barriers.
3. *Relationships between school staff and community agencies have been created and/or strengthened,* resulting in more access to resources by students and more collaboration among agencies.
4. *AIFY supported the school in putting its vision of student success into practice,* through a suite of initiatives including Success Coaches, group and individual mentoring, math tutoring, barrier removal funds, and Career Talks and Tours.

ENABLING FACTORS

The research identified a number of enabling factors that contributed to the success of AIFY.
Key among them are: 1) the vision of school leadership aligned with the goals of AIFY, such that AIFY programs complemented and enhanced the strategies put in place by administration; 2) AIFY agencies supplemented the existing knowledge and supports among school staff, and thus helped to meet different needs of the students; 3) AIFY streamlined communication between community agencies and schools, creating a single conduit of information flow that was manageable for both groups; and, 4) adequate time was given for the relationship and trust-building process between agencies and school staff.

CHALLENGES

Implementing AIFY at McNally faced a number of main challenges. Key among them were: 1) lack of clarity among school staff as to what AIFY offered; 2) limited program capacity, with teachers and agency staff indicating that more students could benefit from a Success Coach, and that there were waiting lists of up to a year for mentoring and tutoring; 3) some staff members talked about the vast number of student resources available in the community, making it difficult for a single initiative, like AIFY, to stand out.; and 4) school staff expressed a desire for more communication around the kinds of needs being met by AIFY and the impact the AIFY programs are having on students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Further explore alignment with Alberta Education:* AIFY's work aligns with the province's high school redesign initiative, enabling schools to put into practice key principles of HSR, including: a) developing meaningful relationships; b) safe, caring, welcoming and respectful school environments; and c) home and community involvement.
2. *Promote collaboration among Alberta government agencies:* For a comprehensive model of school-community collaboration to be institutionalized system-wide, participation is required from multiple government agencies (e.g. Human Services, Alberta Health, Advanced Education and Innovation).
3. *Mentoring for teachers:* Teachers have increased awareness of barriers and of the need to accommodate these barriers in their teaching. Interviews suggested that support for how to teach around the barriers would be helpful, perhaps by AIFY staff providing training during a professional development day.
4. *Consider sustainability:* Both school and agency staff expressed concern about the sustainability of the Success Coach position, as it is resource intensive. Going forward it is important to consider any and all creative ways to continue to provide this key supplementary support.

SUPPORTING CULTURE CHANGE AT BISHOP MCNALLY HIGH SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

All In for Youth[1] (AIFY) is a five-year, city-wide initiative to support youth in successfully completing high school. Developed by United Way of Calgary and Area, AIFY is guided by three principles: Keep youth in school; bring youth back to school; and, connect youth to further education and career opportunities. AIFY's broad strategies include removing barriers to academic and personal success, connecting youth to positive adults, and linking youth to further education and career plans. The collaborative involves the participation of the two Calgary school boards, 20 Calgary high schools, a number of Calgary-based corporations (e.g. Devon, Fluor and Imperial), and youth-serving agencies (e.g. YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary, Big Brothers Big Sisters).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this qualitative research project was to investigate whether and how AIFY has contributed to a shift in school culture[2] at Bishop McNally High School (McNally). McNally was the first school involved in the AIFY initiative, beginning in the 2012-13 school year with the Call Back initiative[3].

This project shifts to a higher level of analysis than previous AIFY research, to examine how the group of projects making up AIFY work together as a whole in a high school setting. Along with the Call Back initiative, McNally hosted the following AIFY projects: an in-house Success Coach, group and individual mentoring, math tutoring, barrier removal funds, SAIT's Introduction to Cook Apprentice program, Detour, and Career Talks and Tours (see Appendix for more information on the individual projects and community agencies involved). The AIFY collaborative also has a School Liaison that supported the integration of programs into the school, helped build relationships between school staff and agency representatives, and holds monthly meetings with school and agency staff to share information and problem solve any issues that may emerge. All of these resources complemented the overall work being done at McNally as a participant in Alberta Education's High School Redesign initiative.

Sixteen semi-structured interviews were held with representatives of the following groups involved in AIFY at McNally: school administration, school staff, community agency staff and United Way staff[4]. Questions covered included: the start-up of AIFY; the major successes and challenges of AIFY; the school culture at McNally; school-community collaboration; key learning areas; and, recommendations for future work. The remainder of the report is organized as follows. The first section provides background on McNally, focusing on the transitions it has undergone in recent years including participation in High School Redesign and a change in leadership. The subsequent sections examine the impacts of AIFY within this context, the main factors that enabled success, the challenges of implementing AIFY, and key areas of further discussion for the AIFY team.

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1 See http://www.allinforyouth.com/
2 The set of norms, values, rituals, and traditions that guide actions of students, staff and administration. See Peterson, K. & T. Deal (1998). How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools, Educational Leadership, 56(1), p. 28-30.
3 See Appendix A for an overview of the AIFY projects hosted by Bishop McNally.
4 See Appendix B for an overview of the research methods.

BACKGROUND – BISHOP MCNALLY

Bishop McNally is located in Northeast Calgary and has a school population in 2015-16 of 1313 students across grades 10 to 12. Of these students, 57% are identified as English Language Learners, with large groups from the Philippines, Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. For many years, McNally had the lowest graduation rate in the Calgary Catholic School District, but recently has seen significant progress in its graduation rate, reaching 79.4% in the 2014-2015 school year, an increase of 10 percentage points over the previous year.

McNally is part of Alberta Education's High School Redesign (HSR) program, which "focuses on research and 'next practice' thinking – where schools have implemented strategies and approaches aimed at transforming the high-school experience for students and teachers through changes to school structure, culture, pedagogy, or leadership[5]". There are nine foundational principles for the HSR work: mastery learning; rigorous and relevant curriculum; personalization; flexible learning environments; assessment; educator roles and professional development; meaningful relationships; home and community involvement; and, schools as welcoming, caring, respectful and safe places[6].

The goals of AIFY overlap with the principles of HSR, in particular the latter three. *Creating meaningful relationships* between students and positive adults ensures no student remains anonymous in high school, that someone in the building cares and understands what's happening with that student both inside and outside the school[7]. The principle of *home and community involvement* recognizes that learning takes place beyond the school walls and invites groups from the wider community to partner with schools in support of student learning. *Welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments* foster multicultural diversity and respect for student diversity.

McNally's principal, Deana Helton, arrived at the school in March 2011, during the third year of the HSR initiative (initially known as the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project). A core principle of HSR is flexibility, creating learning environments that support personalized learning and support the development of meaningful relationships. Helton has introduced many learning innovations to support flexibility at McNally, using an approach she terms "leading from behind"[8]. Examples include:

- Timetabling changes: Using class periods of varying lengths, offering courses in after-school hours.
- Mastery Learning: Giving students the opportunity to redo tests or use other ways to demonstrate they've mastered the required outcomes.
- Literacy assessment for all students, every year.
- Accommodations for English Language Learners (audio recordings of test questions).
- Offering dual credit opportunities (pharmacy, construction, culinary arts, cosmetology).

Helton's leadership created an environment where innovation and flexibility were encouraged. In a recent presentation , for example, Helton talked about encouraging any and all new ideas from staff to integrate flexibility and the idea of supporting staff to take on a leadership role in suggesting possible instructional innovations for student success.

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5 See Alberta Education's High School Redesign website: https://ideas.education.alberta.ca/hsc/redesigning/
6 See Alberta Education's High School Redesign website: https://ideas.education.alberta.ca/hsc/redesigning/
7 http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/media/74574/meaningfulrelationships.pdf
8 Helton, D. (2015). "Teaching Innovation: Leading from Behind", presentation at Sharing our Learning: Moving Forward with High School Redesign conference, Red Deer, October 1.

SCHOOL CULTURE AT BISHOP MCNALLY

School culture is an elusive concept, composed of both the written and unwritten rules about "the way things are" within a particular school. For the purpose of this report, school culture is described as the set of norms, values, rituals, and traditions that guide the actions of students, staff and administration[10]. As the recent experience of McNally has shown, school culture is not static, but continuously constructed through interactions among and between staff, students and the broader community[11]. Helton's approach to innovation, as well as the school's participation in HSR, created the space for culture change.

Both school staff and administration interviews describe the current culture of McNally as community-focused, an environment where no one is better than anyone else and everyone supports each other. One said that McNally is a "giving" school; another that it is a place where if someone is falling behind, it is incumbent on administration, staff and students to help. A third said that staff feel quite connected to students. Staff talked about having students with more challenges/barriers than at other high schools, but at the same time, they talked about setting high expectations for students. The vision of student success for McNally, described by both school staff and leadership in our interviews, revolves around the idea that success looks different for every student, and thus their paths to success will look different.

AIFY AT BISHOP MCNALLY

The chart below shows the number of students at Bishop McNally enrolled in AIFY programs in the most recent reporting period (January to June 2015):

Program	Number of Students
Success Coaches	103
Career Talks and Tours	37
Group Mentoring	23
World of Choices	32
Tutoring	15
SAIT Introduction to Cook Apprentice	3
One-to-one Mentoring	6

9 Ibid.
10 Peterson, K. & T. Deal (1998). How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools, Educational Leadership, 56(1), p. 28-30.
11 Hinde (2004). School Culture and Change: An Examination of the Effects of School Culture on the Process of Change, Essays in Education, 12(3).

AIFY Success Coaches, who work from offices within schools, track the barriers faced by the students who are experiencing challenges with success at school they work with on a monthly basis. They work 1:1 with students to identify and address barriers that are preventing high school completion. Four of the most significant factors identified were a student's lack of positive adults in their lives (in their families, communities or at school); difficulties with attendance; lack of motivation related to school; and, relatedly, failing to complete courses. The chart below lists the barriers mentioned by students at McNally, and the cumulative number of times they were reported over the last six month reporting period (January to June 2015).

Barrier to Success	Number of Times Reported
Lack of positive adults (family, community, school)	60
Problems with attendance	23
Not interested/motivated in school	23
Failing courses	22
Financial hardship	20
Language barriers	16
Lack of food	15
Negative peer influence	14
Coursework too difficult	11
Lack of technology	11
Transportation problems	11
Mental health / addiction issues	10
Family responsibilities	9
Vocational needs not being met at school	7
Lack of relevant courses	7
Employment	6
Employed more than 20 hours/week	5
Unstable housing	4
VISA complications	4
Unable to meet behavioural expectations at school	2
Justice issues	2
Physical health issues	1
Parenting responsibilities	1

KEY IMPACTS OF AIFY AT BISHOP MCNALLY

AIFY has been influential in putting this vision of student success into practice. AIFY was introduced at Bishop McNally approximately a year after Helton took over as principal, and the program has been influential in putting the new vision of student success into practice. Interviewees described a number of key impacts directly resulting from AIFY being in the school.

1) More Successful Students

School and agency staff working at McNally agreed that a major outcome of AIFY has been more success on the part of multi-barriered students. While it is too soon to know AIFY's overall impact on graduation rates at McNally, staff reported seeing positive impacts in individual students' lives because of AIFY support, for example, increased course completion, increased attendance, and graduation. Agency staff also noted seeing student confidence levels improve through AIFY. As well, both school and agency staff said that AIFY has helped students make long-term positive adult relationships that are better equipping them to transition successfully into adulthood.

Some interviewees described the overall success through a more preventative lens, for example that because of AIFY, they are seeing fewer students falling through the cracks or being left behind. In other words, more students who otherwise would have been at risk to leave school prematurely are accessing support. One staff member described feeling more confident to say that, because of AIFY, the school did everything they could for a student before letting them go.

2) Greater Awareness of Student Barriers

School staff reported that AIFY led to an increased awareness of the barriers to academic success their students faced, and alongside this, an increased willingness to help students manage their barriers. For example, one staff member described finding out a student in her class has two kids, something she never would have known if it were not for the connection to the Success Coach. Numerous school staff reported that because of AIFY, and in particular, contact with the Success Coach, they learned more about the barriers preventing their students' success. A wide range of barriers were mentioned in the interviews, including:

- Homelessness or couch surfing
- Negativity and low self-esteem
- Depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts
- Having to babysit siblings because parents are always working
- Language barriers, having to learn English and how to function in a new culture
- Pregnancy
- Being a teen parent
- Hunger and lack of food
- Poverty which prevents students from affording school supplies and bus passes
- Having to work during regular school hours
- Lack of positive adults in their lives
- Trauma

Alongside a greater awareness of student barriers through AIFY, school staff reported a shift in attitude about working with these students to remove or manage these barriers. A school staff interviewee believes the school is now more explicit in recognizing the presence of vulnerable youth and it being the staff's job to meet their needs. Another interviewee described the shift to a situation in which staff recognize they "have the resources to do whatever is the best for at-risk students – even if that means some job descriptions change." At the same time, staff also see more of a focus on instructional excellence.

In the past, there was a tendency of some school staff to encourage students experiencing challenges to complete school in an alternative setting, such as at St. Anne's. Through AIFY, there is more willingness to find out what is at the root of students' problematic behaviour, and this can shift the way they respond to these students. For example, instead of reprimanding students, teachers now make sure they know the school is there to support them. Further, staff will also work to connect them, through AIFY supports like the Success Coach, to resources that address those root causes. Barrier removal funds were specifically mentioned as helpful because it enables the school to meet very specific needs of a student. Significantly, the increased awareness and willingness to work with students facing barriers is something staff felt would continue on in the school, even if AIFY was no longer formally in place at the school.

3) New and Expanding Relationships Between School and Community Agencies

Another core outcome of AIFY at McNally is more openness on the part of the school to collaboration with community agencies, and the development of new school-agency relationships. One interview with a school administrator described experiences with agencies before AIFY as overwhelming, mostly because of the large number of agency requests and each needed to be responded to individually. Now, time is taken to think through how a collaboration might work.

School staff expressed that having agencies in their schools allowed them to be more aware of resources those agencies provide, as well as allowed them to explore and access resources outside of the school that students could connect to through AIFY support. Agency staff found that being under the broad umbrella of AIFY provided easier access to staff and students in the school, and they were able to better share resources among agencies, take part in relevant opportunities in the school, and refer easily to other AIFY programs. For example, the Mentoring Coordinator connected students with Detour, tutoring, and the SAIT Culinary program, as well as referrals to and from the Success Coach, and the Tutoring Coordinator stated that the Success Coach helped support students to show up for tutoring[12]. Agency staff also stated that being a part of AIFY helped them to promote other programs and services for youth that their agencies provide, outside of the scope of AIFY, such as the YMAP program at the YMCA and career counselling at the Youth Employment Centre.

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12 See Appendix A for a description of each of these programs.

4) Support to Put the Vision of Flexibility into Practice

In a recent presentation on Moving Forward with High School Redesign, Principal Helton described how AIFY supported her in putting the vision of flexibility into practice. The first initiative introduced to McNally was the Call Back program, which invited students who had left school to come back. A key learning from that project was that students were still coming back to what Helton calls, the same "square box". They were invited back, but returned to the same school environment that had not worked for them the first time around. Helton said that AIFY provided an impetus for school staff to experiment with how they could do things differently, for those coming back but also to prevent other students from leaving early.

The interviews suggest that AIFY helped the administration and school staff at McNally to recognize a key aspect of their current school culture described above, that success looks different for every student, and so their paths to success will look different and the school needs to accommodate that. Before AIFY, the school had practices like allowing students to redo tests if they did poorly, but the shift in philosophy meant looking at providing novel ways for students to meet course requirements. Examples of these new-found flexible options include online classes, different timetabling, and allowing students to come in for only part of the day. Another example of personalization mentioned in the interviews is that for some students, getting a high school diploma is not the best step to successfully transitioning to adulthood: three students from McNally joined the Culinary Arts program (run by SAIT) and now have a career path, and which was considered by interviewees to be a great success.

AIFY also supported the aspect of vision that says the door is always open, and students are welcomed back. Students are never completely cut off from the school. They can be linked with a Success Coach or through an online class. Additionally, there has been a conversation about creating a wellness centre, where staff from AIFY programs and others similar agencies can all be housed in one place, and students can have a single place to go to get their needs met.

ENABLING FACTORS

Interviews identified four key enabling factors that supported the impacts of AIFY in McNally described in the previous section.

1) Vision of Leadership Aligns with Goals of AIFY

Both school and agency staff commented on the importance of support from school leadership in AIFY's success. One agency interviewee described how other schools have created barriers to integrating the program into the school; in contrast, the leadership at McNally actively embraced and encouraged the support of AIFY in the school. Leadership was key to having AIFY staff involved in school staff meetings, or having AIFY on the agenda of staff meetings was important for successful communication about the program. This ensured that AIFY was top of mind for staff, and indicated that it was a priority. Administrative support helped the programs get access to the school.

Different ways of teaching put in place as part of High School Redesign complemented the efforts of AIFY. For example, having flex time in the school day allowed students who had not been attending to make up time and course material that they had missed, once they were supported by a Success Coach to re-engage with school. The Success Coaches contributed new ideas for working with students, taken specifically from a harm reduction perspective. The willingness of the school to embrace this perspective and try different tactics suggested by the Success Coaches contributed to the program working successfully with students.

Administration at the school was also willing to shift the focus from high school completion to different definitions of success that were meaningful for the students. One example of this was the partnership with the SAIT Culinary program. Entrance into this program did not require a high school diploma, only the completion of specific courses. For students who wanted to pursue this program, school administration and staff, with the help of AIFY staff, were willing to support these students to complete the coursework they needed to get into the SAIT program.

2) AIFY Provides Supplementary Supports

Key to the success of AIFY was that programs provided unique supplementary supports that the school could not provide themselves. In the introduction of the program and the relationship-building process, it was clearly communicated that AIFY programs were supplementary to what school staff provided to students. AIFY fortified the student's experience in a way the school could not on their own. AIFY program staff had a wealth of knowledge of community resources, and for that reason were able to act as navigators for resources that would be helpful to students. Numerous school staff suggested that having community supports integrated into every school should be a mandatory part of the education system in Alberta.

In particular, interviewees discussed the importance of the Success Coach not being a teacher, but someone employed outside the school system. Combined with the fact that they are a "near-peer" to students, the Coach is not perceived as the same kind of authority/disciplinary figure as teachers, principals, and other school staff. Students often comment that they do not feel judged by the Success Coach in the same way as they do by school staff. The Success Coach is also able to do things that teachers cannot, like meet with students at any time of the school day, meet the students outside of school time, and contact the students on their cell phones.

It was highlighted by school and AIFY staff that the in-school location of program staff led to success. This provided easy access to students, and the ability for school staff or other AIFY program staff to take a student to an AIFY staff who could help them. This in-school location was part of a bigger concept; one of removed bureaucracy to collaboration. AIFY staff, especially the Success Coach, were seen as easily accessible. From the point of view of the school staff it was easy to call up or drop in to an AIFY staff at any time.

3) Communication

The School Liaison was seen as pivotal for the success of AIFY at McNally. The role of School Liaison (employed by United Way of Calgary and Area) is to build and nurture collaboration between AIFY schools and participating community agencies. In the past, when individual agencies contacted the school principal for requests, the result was an overwhelming number of requests that were often pushed aside, and ultimately agencies had limited access to the school. With the introduction of the School Liaison, the number of requests to the principal was streamlined and reduced, leading to a manageable flow of information. The School Liaison was also able to channel information back to all of the agency partners, something that would have been too time consuming for a school staff to do while completing their own job duties.

Meetings and phone conversations with the School Liaison, both with school administrative staff and AIFY program staff, were also key. The School Liaison was a conduit for information flow. It was also noted that the credibility of the School Liaison was imperative to her role. The School Liaison had an extensive background in the school system, and understood the nuances of working with a school board, as well as the school culture. This dramatically helped steward the program into McNally, because school staff felt that the School Liaison understood where they were coming from,and could be trusted.

 With the help of the School Liaison's coordination, AIFY staff were able to make presentations to all staff and students at the beginning of the year. Giving program staff access to the students in the school was instrumental for communicating about AIFY programs and success in recruitment. Also, allowing AIFY staff access to speak to students directly in classrooms, for example having the tutoring program come in and speak to math classes, increased the uptake of the AIFY program. In addition, AIFY program staff were invited to key school staff meetings, which was crucial to sharing information with school staff. A cycle of full staff presentations took place at the beginning of the year, which resulted in exposure to AIFY by all school staff.

Having a go-to or point person as the contact in the school for the agency staff was seen as incredibly valuable in ensuring that communication was clear and effective. One Vice-Principal was assigned to AIFY, and AIFY program staff could connect with that Vice-Principal for any AIFY related requests or issues. The agency staff found this particularly effective.

One key strategy that led to successful collaboration in the AIFY program was the institution of monthly meetings with all AIFY staff, under the direction of the School Liaison. AIFY program staff indicated that having these monthly meetings was essential for them to build relationships with each other, communicate about students and cross-refer. Also, having two meetings per semester for the AIFY team with some key school staff allowed the AIFY staff to become better known by the school staff, and for relationships and trust to be built. One agency staff stated that although he was required to attend many of these meetings, since he was involved with many schools, they were the best use of his time, and key to the successful recruitment of students and delivery of his programs.

4) Support and Time for Relationship Building

Another enabling factor was the time taken for relationship and trust building between agencies and school staff. The School Liaison holds monthly meetings with agency and school representatives together to discuss how the programs are working and any issues or concerns. One school staff expressed that she more clearly sees the school understanding that it takes a village to bring the kids through, the school can't do it all. Relationships and trust continued to grow as examples of student success with AIFY programs came to light. As an example, after her positive experience of Career Talks, one school staff referred her husband to connect with the Career Talks coordinator and host a Career Talk himself. Once a teacher has a positive experience with connecting a student to AIFY resources, they continued to refer other students.

CHALLENGES

1) Clarity on What it Means to be an AIFY School

There was a lack of awareness of school staff of the full suite of AIFY programs and who the AIFY staff are. The vast majority of the school representatives interviewed associated AIFY with the Success Coach. While this can be positive, because school staff have one key contact to refer their students to, for some interviewees this was to the exclusion of any other AIFY services. For example, one teacher had very positive things to say about Career Talks, but was unaware that Career Talks was a component of AIFY. When school staff do not know all of the components of AIFY, they may not refer students who could benefit from the lesser-known programs. The interviews suggest that while the overarching idea of AIFY had spread widely, many questions remained about the specifics of the services available. Significantly, this is despite having AIFY presented at a school staff meeting and every staff member receiving a handout with all of the participating programs described (along with a contact person).

Relatedly, there was confusion on what it means to be an AIFY school. If school staff did not have a student who was involved with AIFY, or were not designated by school administration to be a key contact in AIFY, it seemed that they were not aware and did not have a clear understanding of the program. This may have stemmed from confusion on part of all of the partners in AIFY. The school administration promoted the vision that every student's path to success is unique; AIFY was associated with this vision, described as not just a program in the school, but "who we are" now. Some staff interpreted this as meaning that all students could have access to AIFY programs. Agency staff, in contrast, indicated in the interviews that their programs were intended to target vulnerable or barriered youth, and that their goal was not to reach the broader population. This appears to be something that all of the partners still struggle with understanding.

2) Program Capacity

The individual mentoring program at McNally was typically full with a waiting list of up to a year, meaning students who could benefit from having a mentor were left waiting. Meanwhile, there were far greater numbers of volunteer career connector mentors than students. This indicates that while career mentoring is a more attractive option for volunteers, the students prefer the more traditional, individual style of mentoring, which takes place over a longer period of time. It was discussed by program staff that developing relationships, including mentoring relationships, takes a great deal of time, which can prove challenging in the school setting.

At McNally in particular, commitment level of students is very low in tutoring. A great number of students who entered the tutoring program stopped participating. At the same time, there was a limited number of students who could attend, so some who wanted to access tutoring never had an opportunity, or would not bother applying because they would not be able to get in. These issues were never overcome, but they indicate a need to investigate how the tutoring program might be designed differently to better meet the needs of McNally students.

Some teachers and agency staff indicated challenges with limited program capacity. For example, one teacher stated that more students could benefit from a Success Coach, but her time is limited and she is only one person, so some students may miss out. This was also evidenced by the challenges of both the mentoring and tutoring programs in being able to accept all of the students who were interested.

3) Seen by Some as 'Just Another Initiative'

Though it aligned with HSR and the vision of leadership, there were some school staff that talked about AIFY being just another initiative, whose time would eventually pass. Another described how AIFY has lasted longer than most other external programs, leading to optimism about the future. Multiple staff interviewees talked about the vast number of programs and resources available to teachers, which makes it difficult for individual ones to stand out. Being exposed to such a large number of resources may be part of the reason for the lack of detailed understanding of the AIFY programming choices.

4) Communication

A related concern raised by school staff is being unsure of what happens to students after they are referred to AIFY. School staff members expressed a desire for more communication in a number of areas: getting a better understanding of the kinds of needs that are being met by AIFY, knowing which kids are part of an AIFY program, and finding out what impact AIFY is having for students. It was expressed by school staff that it is important to learn firsthand from the students how AIFY has helped them become successful. The measure of success can best be determined by those who directly benefitted from the programs.

In considering the identified challenges, it is important to recognize that over the course of implementation of AIFY, school and agency staff continue to undertake exploration and investigation of strategies, processes and innovations to address them in their day to day work. This has included strategies such as:

- Widening the number of staff directly involved with AIFY students;
- Consideration of expanding access to instructional support;
- Building in a revised structure for students who accept the invitation of the 'call back'; and,
- Maintaining an intentional connection to students experiencing difficulties.

RECOMMENDATIONS GOING FORWARD

1) Further Explore Alignment of AIFY with Alberta Education's High School Redesign Initiative

This study shows the alignment of AIFY's work with that of the province's high school redesign initiative. AIFY supports and enables high schools to put into practices some of the key principles of HSR, in particular developing meaningful relationships, and home and community involvement. AIFY has shown itself to be a successful model of introducing community agencies and resources into a high school and making them part of the school culture. It is important to explore further how AIFY can support Alberta Education's HSR initiative.

2) Promote Collaboration Among Alberta Government Agencies

For a model of school-community collaboration to be institutionalized system-wide will require participation from multiple government agencies beyond Alberta Education, for example Alberta Health, Human Services, and Advanced Education and Innovation. While the mandate to increase high school completion rates falls under Alberta Education, the case study shows that collaboration between schools and community agencies supports students to overcome social, health, and financial barriers that interfere with academic success and positive transitions to adulthood.

3) Mentoring for Teachers

The study shows that teachers have increased awareness of barriers and the need to accommodate them in their teaching. Interviews suggested that support for how to teach around the barriers would be helpful. There is staff buy-in to support the school's vision of different versions of success for all students, but more training or knowledge on how to implement it would make staff more effective. One school staff suggested having AIFY staff provide training to school staff during a professional development day. Agency staff recommended that providing training on trauma-informed care would be highly beneficial to school staff who work with the multi-barriered students that AIFY sees.

4) Consider Sustainability

While the value of AIFY, and the Success Coach especially, was widely recognized in the school, both school and agency staff expressed concern about the sustainability of the Success Coach position. Without the financial support of AIFY, there is great doubt that funding will be found for Success Coaches, either by the school or agencies. Having a Success Coach in each school, while effective, is very resource intensive. There was discussion that even if the school board were able to financially support a Success Coach position, having a Success Coach employed directly by the school district would provide its own barriers. Some of the benefits of Success Coaches, like the ability to text students, meeting outside of school location or hours, working with students not currently in school, and reaching out to grade nines, would be challenging or not possible if the Success Coach was a school staff person. Going forward it is important to consider any and all creative ways to continue to provide key supports such as Success Coaches in high schools.

APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF AIFY PROGRAMS

Program	Description	Lead Organization
Bissett Scholarship	Full 1st year tuition for up to 20 AIFY high school graduates who demonstrate financial need, and an interest in continuing their education at SAIT Polytechnic.	SAIT Polytechnic
Bright Futures Bursary	Math and Science tutoring and/or Diploma Prep bursaries at one of three Renert Center locations in Calgary. Bursaries are for students with "spark but no $$ resources".	Burns Memorial Fund, The Renert Centre
Career Talks	30 minute informal conversations that promote high school completion and help students discover a variety of careers (including the trades) with the help of volunteers who share their personal stories and the paths that led to their respective professions.	The City of Calgary Youth Employment Centre
Detour	An alternative route to high school completion for those students who were not successful within a traditional high school program or who are returning to school after taking time away from school.	Bow Valley College, Burns Memorial Fund, Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary
Math Tutoring	After school math tutoring at one of five YMCA locations. Students receive nutritious snacks, two hours of tutoring and mentorship, and a pass to the YMCA for regular attendance.	YMCA Calgary/Renert Centres
mPower Mentoring	Mentors encourage and empower high school youth to identify their strengths, explore their passions and achieve their goals as they journey towards adulthood.	Big Brothers Big Sisters
SAIT Introduction to Cook Apprentice Program	A unique four month pilot program being offered May – August at SAIT's world-class culinary campus. Students will be trained to be job-ready upon graduation for the growing food services industry.	SAIT Polytechnic
Success Coaches	Embedded in select Calgary high schools, the Success Coach will provide 1:1 support for students by addressing barriers that prevent high school completion.	Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary
World of Choices	This day-long event pairs high school girls with female Career Mentors and provides opportunities to explore a wide array of careers.	Junior Achievement of Southern Alberta
YMAP	Year-round after school programs offering support and a positive experience for high school youth who are new to Canada, working towards a healthy integration into their community. Open to high school youth with a wide variety of English levels.	YMCA Calgary

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH METHOD

The research team conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with representatives of the following groups: school administration, school staff, community agency staff and United Way staff. Questions covered the following categories:

- Start-up period of AIFY;
- Major successes and challenges of AIFY;
- Perceptions of the school culture at McNally;
- Nature of the school-community collaboration;
- Key learning areas for agencies/schools; and recommendations for future work in McNally as well as AIFY schools overall.

The interview notes were analyzed using a qualitative software program called Dedoose. Two researchers created a code structure and used it to code 5 interviews independently of each other. They then compared results, talked through discrepancies and revised the code structure, making the coding work an iterative process.

Information was also gathered from annual reports from AIFY's different programs, as well as from the Success Coach's monthly reports, which record the kinds of barriers students are facing on a monthly basis.

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