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Introduction

For decades, the post-secondary education sector in Canada has spent the majority of its research, policy and program efforts dealing with tuition fees and student aid. Discussions in PSE circles often centre on false dichotomies like “lower tuition” versus “targeted assistance”. We spend too much of our creative energy, passion and enthusiasm trying to find the one policy option that will solve all of the challenges in the higher education sector. A clear illustration of this approach is the oft-cited call for “free tuition” as the panacea to accessibility and affordability. Unfortunately, none of these options will singularly resolve the issue that is accessibility to post-secondary education.

After all these years of discussion, debate and discourse, the most significant learning we have is that access is complex and multi-faceted, that there is not, in fact, one policy tool that will solve all of our problems.

Recent research speaks to the impact of “interacting barriers” on access to higher education. Certainly, we already know a great deal about the barriers that student face once they decide to attend post-secondary institutions. In Nova Scotia, students carry the highest financial burden of any other North American jurisdiction – a “perfect storm” of high tuition fees, low wages and insufficient student assistance.¹ As the November 2007 review of Nova Scotia’s student financial assistance programs demonstrated, students also face a multitude of barriers in obtaining adequate aid to pay for tuition, books, fees and living. However, in order for students to even get to a place where they are facing these types of barriers, they have to already be prepared, willing and able to go on to post-secondary education. This is where interacting barriers come in. These barriers are often grouped together as academics, finances and interest and motivation. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF) has been one of the sector’s leaders in identifying these barriers. In the 2007 edition of the *Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*, the authors discuss these barriers in the following way:

- Academic ability, measured by grades or standardized tests, is closely linked with postsecondary enrolment. High school graduates with “C” averages are about half as likely as those with “A” grades to pursue post-secondary studies within two years of graduation.

¹ Usher, Alex & Kim Steele. (2006). *Beyond the 49th Parallel: The Affordability of University Education*. Toronto: Educational Policy Institute.

- Finances play a substantial role. During the past 15 years, the cost of higher education in Canada has grown significantly. One-third of youth who do not pursue higher education cite their financial situation as an obstacle to further studies.
- Youth who lack career focus, who are uninterested in school or who lack a network of support for post-secondary studies are less likely to complete a post-secondary education. The barrier most often cited by those who did not pursue postsecondary studies within two years of graduating high school is a combination of a lack of career focus or a lack of interest in higher education.
- At the university level, there are two youths from the highest-income families for every low-income student. Low-income youth are less likely to have savings for higher education, to discuss financing their studies with their parents and to report receiving sufficient information about postsecondary education. Additionally, low-income youth generally score lower on standardized tests and report lower high school grades than wealthier students.
- Compared to the children of post-secondary graduates, first-generation youth are less likely to plan for higher education, to be convinced of its benefits or to have above average high school grades. They are more likely to put off postsecondary education after high school and those who do enrol are less likely to have access to financial support from family.
- Aboriginal youth are substantially less likely to have completed high school than non-Aboriginal individuals, particularly in Western Canada. Manitoba, seven in ten on-reserve First Nations youth had not completed high school by age 24. In addition to the barriers discussed in detail in this chapter, Aboriginal Peoples face a number of unique obstacles, including incidences of real and perceived racism in the school system.²

Often the barriers listed above overlap with one another, making the decision to attend post-secondary education very complex and barrier-ridden for those from under-represented groups.

In Nova Scotia, these barriers are especially acute, with the cost of university above the cost in any other province and with persistent poverty in many communities across the province. In addition to the challenges experienced by Aboriginal youth living in Nova Scotia, African Nova Scotians face specific barriers that often interact with one another.

There are compelling social and economic reasons to invest in a co-ordinated, strategic and integrated early outreach program in Nova Scotia. From an economic prosperity perspective, it is clear that post-secondary education can be Nova Scotia's competitive advantage in the knowledge-based economy³. We still have many obstacles to overcome if we are going to fully utilize this advantage. In particular, our province is facing declining demographics which will continue to mean declining enrolments unless participation rates increase⁴.

² Berger, Joseph, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin. (2007). The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, pg. 33.

³ Knowledge Economy Report Card: 2006-07: Defining & Developing Tomorrow's Workforce (2007). Halifax: NovaKnowledge, pg. 2.

⁴ McNiven, Jim and David Sables & Assoc. "The Nova Scotia Demographic Research Report: A Demographic Analysis of Nova Scotia into 2026". (2006). Canmac Economics Ltd. Jozsa Management & Economics.

Participation rate growth will not likely happen without a strategic approach to make it happen and participation is not going to come from the places it has traditionally come from – middle and upper-class youth. We need to be creating policy tools that target access for the groups who are traditionally under-represented in universities – students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, students with disabilities and Aboriginal students (especially given that they are the fastest growing demographic in Canada). In addition to young people who are not participating now, we need to start talking seriously about participation for single parents who may not fit that traditional model of a student – they might be older, they will have different educational and student life needs than a traditional student who goes to school right out of high school, but these are the sorts of changes we need to be talking about and making in our universities.

In addition to this clear economic imperative, our region is also facing a shortage in skilled workers. This is not a shortage felt just in the Atlantic region, but across the country. In order to ensure that we have the right people for the right jobs, we should look to our school system and other programs to better encourage educational and career pathways.

While the economic incentive to invest in early outreach is apparent, investing in early outreach is, more importantly, simply the right thing to do. From a social justice perspective, we know that the old adage that “education is the silver bullet” is true. This statement usually refers to the P-12 education system, but certainly the same can be said for higher education, especially given that an undergraduate degree or diploma is quickly becoming the new high school diploma in terms of participation in the labour market⁵. Study after study from banks, governments and think-tanks keep confirming what we already know: post-secondary education has significant benefits not just for the individual, but for the community as a whole. From the social determinants of health to crime reduction to ending the cycle of poverty to increasing economic development and everything in between, we know that a highly educated population is the way to go.

But, as discussed above, we also know that increasing participation rates in post-secondary education and encouraging those from under-represented groups to attend will not be simple. We will need outreach programs to those currently under-represented in higher education as well as programs to support at-risk kids to increase their high school graduation rates. We will need tutoring and mentorship and to continue building strong communities where youth can thrive and grow.

Over the last four months, ANSSA has been meeting with groups from across Nova Scotia in both the social and economic sector, as well as within government, to discuss the impact of interacting non-financial barriers in preventing access for students from under-represented groups. This policy represents the beginning of ANSSA’s engagement with issues related to early outreach, not the conclusion of that engagement. In order to take early outreach and the necessarily varied policy tools seriously, we must build partnerships with community groups, businesses, post-secondary education institutions and government and

⁵ According to the 2007 NS Department of Labour & Workforce Development Labour Market Review (2008): “those with a higher education are more likely to be employed than those with less than a high school diploma: 82.2% of individuals, aged 25-64 with a university degree are employed compared to only 50.2% for those with less than a high school diploma.” (pg. 9).

continue to develop a broad consensus among Nova Scotians about the need to invest in programs of early outreach.

As academics, policy-makers, student advocates, politicians and educators concerned with the accessibility of a post-secondary education, we have a responsibility to think about the challenges of access from a different perspective. Discussed below are some of the ways that the Province of Nova Scotia can act to become a leader in thinking differently about access.

** Please see Appendix I for descriptions of successful early outreach programs in other jurisdictions. **

Therefore, ANSSA recommends that the provincial government undertake the following:

Recommendation One: The provincial government must introduce a "Student Access Guarantee" which would include varied and diverse short-term and long-term policy tools and programs, beginning with an "early outreach strategy".

In consultation with stakeholder groups including but not limited to students, post-secondary institutions and community-based organization, the development of an early outreach strategy to foster increased participation in all types of post-secondary education for under-represented groups is an excellent first-step to the introduction of a "Student Access Guarantee".

The need to support students, families and communities with the information and resources to help students make informed decisions about their educational pathways is clear. The need to target students from under-represented group in order to increase participation, retention and completion rates for these students is also clear. The methods, however, are multi-faceted and multi-focused. In the United States, where many early outreach programs exist on a state-wide basis, many approaches to early outreach are employed, from academic and informational support services, to financial incentives to parental involvement activities to mentoring to personal/social integration and enrichment to summer activities.⁶ All of these methods are valid and have the potential to positively impact the targeted groups.

This multi-faceted and multi-focused approach, however, could be ineffective in comprehensively addressing access if a strategy for early outreach is not developed. A strategy of this nature will be most successful if all community partners are invited to the table to discuss how programs and policies can work together to meet common goals.

An early outreach strategy would signal the beginning of the introduction of a "Student Access Guarantee" which would represent a significant commitment on behalf of the Nova Scotia government to invest in student success and access for all students to attend post-secondary education. There is not one simple policy option that will make such a guarantee a

⁶See Appendix I of this policy and Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond & Jamie Merisotis. (February 2003). Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

reality; instead a series of co-ordinated programs are necessary to ensure that no student is denied access to post-secondary education for financial reasons.

Access is complex, complicated and cannot be solved with one policy tool; it requires a multitude of policy options, all working together to increase access. Access is about pathways, about psychological motivations, the links between a variety of factors, about information, and about self-esteem and support at a much earlier stage than grade twelve.

Recommendation Two: The provincial government should undertake to comprehensively “map” existing early outreach-related programs across Nova Scotia.

In order for the implementation of an early outreach strategy to be successful, we must first have a clearer picture of existing programs and supports across the province. A comprehensive way to address this issue would be to “map”, school board by school board the kinds of active programs currently taking place. Mapping this information by school board is simply intended to be a way to effectively collect and organize the relevant information. We would be interested in mapping programs on the full range of the spectrum: from the provision of social services like breakfast and lunch programs to mentorship provided by community-based organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters to leadership development provided by groups like Junior Achievement to curriculum dealing with financial planning to self-esteem-building. This map would take into consideration the number of youth from various under-represented groups and would look to enumerate the kinds of programs operating to support those groups of students.

In addition, mapping of this nature should take into consideration what kind of information is getting to all students, not just those from under-represented groups, about all forms of post-secondary education, career and education pathways.

This will not be a simple task. It will be complex and will require working with community organizations and trusting community knowledge to know what is best and what is happening and not happening in their schools and neighbourhoods. This is a mapping project that will step over “traditional” Department of Education territory and therefore should be undertaken with the support of many community, business and government partners.

Mapping of this nature, however, will be essential in making early outreach really work in Nova Scotia. Only through mapping will be able to identify where the gaps in programming exist in a community-based way. Perhaps there is a school board where there are a number of traditional social services being provided to a predominately low-income community, but very little in the way of leadership development, skill development or confidence-building. A map like this could help us understand our province in a much more nuanced way.

Recommendation Three: The provincial government must establish a not-for-profit foundation with an endowment sufficient to fund community-based early outreach programs across Nova Scotia.

Over the last few years, a broad consensus has emerged around the importance of addressing all of the barriers to post-secondary education from financial to social and

cultural to academic to informational and motivational. These are diverse outcomes and therefore require diverse strategies to address the barriers.

A number of groups including the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance have advocated for the establishment of a foundation to fund early outreach programs at a community-based level. Using a policy tool such as a foundation would allow a set of goals or targets to be developed. Through an open application process, community-based organizations, institutions and individuals would be able to access funding for projects, from pilot projects to longer-term, proven successful programs.

The foundation's goals could be based on the program gaps identified in the findings of the province-wide "early outreach map" discussed in Recommendation Two. This would ensure that the provincial government would be in a position to support and fund programs that will be meeting the needs of communities and would be doing so in a flexible, targeted and effective manner.

In addition to allowing for flexibility, a foundation model would allow for funding to come from a variety of government departments including but not limited to education, community services, justice and labour and workforce development. This would spread out the financial burden among various departments that would be served by increased participation levels for traditionally under-represented groups. Each government department ought to have an interest in promoting the social and economic prosperity of the province and its citizens as a whole; a policy tool such as a foundation for early outreach allows for each department to demonstrate this commitment clearly and through funding support.

The creation of a foundation should include comprehensive consultation of stakeholder groups, particularly the groups and associations representing high school and post-secondary students. Students should be included in the governing structure of the foundation. In addition, the foundation should provide an annual report as well as audited financial statements. The foundation should be arms-length from the provincial government, but under the purview of the Department of Education.

Recommendation Four: Early outreach programs must provide information and resources to students and families to assist in making better informed decisions about educational pathways, including but not limited to guidance counselling, parental involvement activities and curriculum changes.

While the Department of Education is currently undertaking some important outreach activities, there is still much more work to be done to better educate Nova Scotians about the availability of various financial aid options. This information alone, of course, will not address the many barriers faced by students from under-represented backgrounds, but this knowledge and outreach can certainly be part of the solution. Outlined below are some areas where the provincial government should take meaningful steps towards providing relevant information and resources to students and their parents.

Guidance Counselling – The provincial government must provide the support for professional development for guidance counsellors to ensure that they are accurately informed about

developments in student financial aid and about various post-secondary options. Through one-on-one counseling and group presentations, guidance counsellors, if armed with the right information and enough information, would be able to get to students throughout high school.⁷

Parental Involvement Activities - All early outreach programs should include an element of parental involvement. From resource manuals with accurate information about both the costs and benefits of all manner of post-secondary education to actively engaging parents with their children in discussing educational pathways, parents are an essential link in the decision-making processes for students.

Curriculum Changes - Through the Department of Education, curriculum should be introduced at the high school level that provides training on personal financial management as well as information on the benefits of university, college and the skilled trades. British Columbia high schools have recently introduced such a project with an interactive CD and training programs.⁸ The curriculum should also be altered to integrate information about various career choices and opportunities into all courses.

Recommendation Five: The provincial government must adequately fund and universities should implement and/or strengthen social and academic support and assistance programs targeted for, but not limited to, under-represented students.

Getting into university or college is already a challenge for students from under-represented groups. In an effort to ensure that support mechanisms are in place to help students from these groups succeed once they do attend, institutions must take the leadership role with adequate funding resources from the provincial government. For Aboriginal students, these support programs are especially essential. As transition from community living to a university student lifestyle is often a difficult obstacle to overcome, many post-secondary institutions throughout Canada have begun bringing community support onto campuses. This is integral in ensuring that Aboriginal students can successfully achieve their academic pursuits. Services for Aboriginal students on campus should include academic support, student personal support, access to elder support and general space for Aboriginal cultural activity. Although the scope of these services may vary between institutions based on need, the value delivered to Aboriginal students would be immeasurable. Many universities have already recognized the importance of creating appropriate supports for under-represented groups. In their submission to Ontario's review of post-secondary education, the University of Toronto describes their commitment to achieving these ends.

If the goal is to provide access to students who might not otherwise have been able to come to the University, it is likely that to some extent their needs will not be met by current curriculum, pedagogy, services and supports ... Thus our outreach

⁷ Canadian Career Development Foundation, *The role of guidance in post-secondary planning* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, March 2003).

⁸ See "Perspectives: Getting an Inside look at post-secondary education". Sponsored by the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education & the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Created by Academica Group Inc.

initiatives need to be connected to discussions about the student experience at the University of Toronto from the perspective of the students for whom we are providing access and outreach. It is important to note that just as these students enrich the university in terms of university and life experience, any "accommodations" we make to support and enhance their educational experience will contribute positively to the experiences of all students. It is also important to note that there will be costs (in terms of both financial aid and people providing necessary support and accommodation) associated with these students.⁹

There are a variety of support services and curriculum design that can and should be effectively targeted at the institutional level to support Aboriginal, low-income, first-generation and rural students.

Recommendation Six: Early outreach programs must be tailored to the unique needs of a community and co-ordinated to ensure that community plans effectively support the programs of early outreach.

While the provincial government has the obligation to fund and provide the broad infrastructure for early outreach programs, programs that will be the most successful will be those created by, supported by and administered by the local community. Post-secondary education institutions, not-for-profit groups, the business community, school boards, social service providers and public libraries all have a vested interest in supporting improved higher educational outcomes for their youth.¹⁰ Working in a co-ordinated way with various provincial departments at the local level will allow the programs to address many community needs at the same time.

However, it must also be recognized that different communities have varied capacity to create and support programs of this nature. The provincial government, through its various departments has an obligation to help build capacity where it does not exist and create the supportive infrastructure to ensure the success of programs focused on early outreach. Also, higher education institutions have an obligation to the community to take the leadership co-ordinating role in the development and support of early outreach programs within their communities.

Recommendation Seven: The provincial government must introduce targeted grants to improve access for under-represented groups of students.

There is a growing consensus about the need to target funding to those who need it the most as well as the need to provide a student assistance package that includes a balance of loans and grants. Until recently, Nova Scotia's near-exclusive reliance on loans has put that ideal balance out of reach. Investment in targeted assistance through the establishment of a

⁹ University of Toronto, "Appendix D: Access and Outreach Programs at the University of Toronto", in *The Choice for a Generation: Investing in Higher Education and Ontario's Future* (Toronto: UofT, 2004); accessed online at http://www.raereview.utoronto.ca/UTresponse_19_appendixD.html.

¹⁰ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond & Jamie Merisotis. (February 2003). *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

series of grants for low-income, first generation and rural students is an excellent way to re-balance the student aid package.

Recommendation Eight: Regular assessment must be done on any early outreach programs that are implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs.

In order to ensure that early outreach programs are meeting the needs of the community effectively, evaluation and assessment on the programs and outcomes must be done, with both a short-term and longitudinal perspective. To help facilitate this, institutions should develop methods to track under-represented groups to determine entrance, retention and completion rates. In order to determine funding allocations for community-based early outreach programs, this new foundation must have the ability to assess the value and objectives of the proposed programs. This kind of assessment can and should be done in-house. In addition, regular program reviews and evaluations to track the short-term and longitudinal success of programs should be conducted by independent research bodies. This research will help contribute to an under-developed field in the area of post-secondary education.

APPENDIX I: Early Outreach Programs in Other Jurisdictions

Excerpted directly from “Modernizing Canada’s System of Student Financial Assistance”. (November 2007). Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). Available online: www.casa.ca/documents/Vision_for_Student_Financial_Aid_Final.pdf.

3.2 Early Outreach Programs

Other programs that help to address both the financial and physiological barriers of pursuing post-secondary education are early outreach programs. Early outreach programs, also commonly known as early intervention or head start programs, aim to increase participation in post-secondary education by focusing on students while they are still in high school or even elementary school. Most programs are geared toward increasing post-secondary access for under-represented groups, such as low-income students, Aboriginal students, or rural students.

3.2.1 Pathways to Education

One such example of an early outreach program is the Regent Park “Pathways to Education: project. The Regent Park area of Toronto is one of the oldest public housing projects and one of the most economically disadvantaged regions in Canada. It is a community that faces many financial, language and cultural barriers. Namely:

- Few families are earning more than \$18,000 per year (less than 1/3 the national average);
- Over 80 per cent of residents are visible minorities, many for whom English is a second language;
- The region has twice the number of single parent families as the rest of Toronto¹¹.

¹¹ <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/regent/regent.html>. Accessed September 2007.

Pathways to Education, a stay-in-school initiative, has been operating since 2001 with a significant level of success. The program, in which 95 per cent of Regent Park's high-school students are enrolled, has seen the high-school dropout rate decrease from 56 per cent to just 10 per cent. Further, post-secondary enrolment has quadrupled, from 20 per cent to 80 per cent¹². The program not only offers tutors, but also provides support workers, free transit tickets to help students get to and from school, and bursaries of \$1,000 per student per year to use toward college or university.¹³ The program relies on about \$3 million a year in private donations for 85 per cent of its funding, while provincial grants pay the rest.¹⁴

3.2.2 CMSF Pilot Project

The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation has been active in piloting projects across the country which aim to encourage high school students to pursue post-secondary education. One such project is "Future to Discover," launched in partnership with the governments of Manitoba and New Brunswick.¹⁵ The project began in 2004 and is slated to run for six years. It involves 4,400 randomly selected volunteer students at 30 New Brunswick high schools (15 English and 15 French), and 1,050 students in Manitoba at 21 sites.¹⁶ The project has two components: "Explore your Horizons" and "Learning Accounts".

The first component, Explore Your Horizons, includes four classroom-based initiatives. In total, students obtain about 50 hours of workshops over three years dealing with career counseling and the importance of post-secondary studies (including apprenticeships and vocational training).¹⁷

Learning Accounts supports student participants who face financial obstacles to post-secondary education by providing an incentive of \$8,000, deposited into a trust account. The trust can be accessed upon successful completion of high school and enrolment in an accredited post-secondary institution. This second component is being delivered only in New Brunswick and is available to students from families with incomes below the provincial median.¹⁸ Using random assignment, some students participate only the Explore Your Horizons component or the Learning Accounts program, while others participate in both.

Another program that the CMSF currently runs draws on a very successful American early intervention program, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID was designed by Mary Catherine Swanson, a San Diego high school teacher who wanted to

¹²http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070716.wxpathways16/BNSStory/National/?cid=al_gam_nletter_newsUp. Accessed September 2007.

¹³ They gain access to the bursary as long as they finish high school with decent grades.
http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070716.wxpathways16/BNSStory/National/?cid=al_gam_nletter_newsUp. Accessed September 2007.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ More information can be found on the CMSF website:

<http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ppFTD.asp>. Accessed October 2007.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

encourage her inner-city students to achieve higher academic standards and succeed at the post-secondary level.¹⁹ The AVID pilot project in Canada is being run in partnership with the CMSF and the Government of British Columbia. It involves 1,200 students in 20 schools over 5 years.²⁰ It is an in-school academic support program for students in grades 9-12 that prepares them for post-secondary studies, by placing academically average students in advanced post-secondary preparatory classes and providing them with the necessary skills and support structure to succeed. One of its main goals is to level the playing field for minority, rural and low-income students, including those students whose families have no history of post-secondary attendance.²¹

Though the impact that this program will have on post-secondary participation in Canada is not yet known, results in the longer-running programs in the United States have been reaffirming. In 2005-06, AVID students had an impressive 99 per cent graduation rate from high school, compared with the national average of 82 per cent.²² Furthermore, AVID graduates from low-income groups enrolled in post-secondary institutions in equal or greater proportions to students from higher income groups. In total, 75 per cent of the 2006 AVID graduates were accepted into a four-year college program.²³

Two other programs that the CMSF is currently running are aimed at improving participation and retention of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education. The first, LE, NONET, is being conducted in partnership with the University of Victoria. The project pilots a series of interventions over a four-year period designed to improve the retention of Aboriginal students registered in university programs through to graduation. This program includes access to mentoring, financial assistance, community internships, research assistantships, and improved support services.²⁴

The second project, Making Education Work, is a five-year joint initiative with the Government of Manitoba and several First Nations communities.²⁵ The project is designed to increase the postsecondary participation rate of Aboriginal students through a comprehensive set of interventions that includes better information, academic support, mentoring, community involvement and an Aboriginal curriculum (elective courses are available in Aboriginal Studies, Aboriginal Languages and Law).²⁶

Excerpted directly from "Early Outreach Programs: Reaching Out Early to Reach Higher" (October 2006). Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). Available online: www.ousa.ca/uploaded_files/pdf_files/Policy%20Papers%20and%20Statements/EarlyOutreachPolicy.pdf

The following are some of the successful early outreach programs in practice:

Pathways to Education, Toronto

¹⁹ <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ppAVID.asp>. Accessed October 2007.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² <http://www.avidonline.org/info/?ID=2120&tabID=1>. Accessed October 2007.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ppLENONET.asp>. Accessed October 2007.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

The Pathways to Education program was founded by the Regent Park Community Health Centre in 2000, aiming to break the cycle of poverty in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the province by increasing the rate of young people attending post-secondary education. The broader long-term goal is that the children of Regent Park will become doctors, nurses, administrators, lawyers, and civil servants, and ultimately return to the community and support its ongoing development.²⁷

About 800 Regent Park students participate in the program, about 95 per cent of eligible participants. The program provides mandatory tutoring for students whose marks fall below a certain level, and participants have mentors and support workers who can speak to them, their parents or their school. Participants receive public transit fare (since there is no local high school and many students cannot afford bus fare), and are provided \$1,000 a year towards college or university tuition.²⁸ Pathways also develops a relationship with parents to ensure that they are playing an active role in their child's education, particularly where there are language and cultural barriers.²⁹

The program's annual budget is \$2.9 million a year, and it is funded mainly by businesses, community groups, unions, and individuals. The provincial government provides 15 per cent of its funding. The program has 33 full-time and part-time employees, as well as 200 adult volunteers.³⁰

Pathways has demonstrated dramatic results in improving the academic performance and future prospects of its participants:

- The high school drop-out rate has fallen from 56 per cent to 14 per cent;
- There is a 90 per cent acceptance rate for applicants to college or university;
- There has been a 75 per cent reduction in the number of students with serious attendance programs;³¹
- The proportion of Regent Park youth moving on to college or university has tripled from less than 20 per cent to over 60 per cent since 2001.³²

GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), United States

There is a longer history of early outreach programs in the United States, where the federal government has offered matching funding programs for states that offer such programs since 1992. The current federal program is called GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), and funds partnerships between high-poverty middle schools, colleges and universities, community organizations, and businesses.

Projects offer tutoring, mentoring, counselling, parent involvement activities, curricula and staff development. Services include financial aid counselling, information about federal

²⁷ Carolyn Acker, "A Message from the Executive Director", accessed online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/home-executive.html>.

²⁸ "The Pathways Chance", *Globe and Mail*, September 28, 2005, A24.

²⁹ Acker.

³⁰ "The Pathways Chance".

³¹ Pathways to Education website, accessed online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/facts.html>

³² "Pathways students move on", *Pathways Newsletter*, Fall 2006; online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/regent/Fall-2006.pdf>.

financial aid, college and admission test preparation, advice on college application procedures, and information for parents on helping their children prepare for college. Rather than targeting particular students, the projects are offered to entire cohorts of students at schools serving predominantly low-income communities. Some projects offer scholarships to participants that are funded by the state government.³³ Average grants to projects are US\$1.2 million for partnership projects run by schools and post-secondary institutions in partnership with other community-based organizations, and US\$3 million for state partnership projects.³⁴

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), California

AVID is one of the longest-running early outreach programs, and can therefore illustrate some longer-term outcomes achieved after students complete high school, which are not yet available for most other programs. Participation in AVID involves enrolling in one for-credit class through both middle and high school, where they learn academic survival and college entry skills such as note-taking techniques, time management, research skills, and strategies for writing tests. AVID courses also include tutoring sessions, motivational activities, as well as career and college exploration. The program targets middle and high school students from low-income, first-generation, ethnic minority backgrounds. AVID began in San Diego County in 1980 and has since expanded to more than 800 sites across California as well as 16 states. In 2002, the program served about 65,000 students in the United States.

The pathways of AVID graduates indicate that the program has had a clear long-term impact upon their academic success and post-secondary participation:

- In 1994-95, 98 per cent of AVID program graduates enrolled at California post-secondary institution, compared to 55 per cent of non-participants from the same area.
- AVID graduates were three times more likely to attend four-year colleges than the state average, and they had higher retention rates once enrolled.
- The AVID program also appeared to overcome the negative effect of parental income and education. AVID graduates from lowest-income groups enrolled in colleges in equal or greater proportions to students from higher income groups who had not participated in AVID.³⁵

³³ Cunningham, Redmond and Merisotis, p.9-11.

³⁴ GEAR-UP website, accessed online at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/gtepgearup.pdf>.

³⁵ Cunningham, Redmond and Merisotis, p.43-44.