all
in **for**
youth

Year **4**

EVALUATION
REPORT

OPENING REMARKS

Four years ago, AIFY and its partners set out to change the game. Students and families in socially complex school communities needed more support and it was time for a different approach. Isolated, siloed efforts weren't adequate. Schools and community agencies were trying to do the best they could, yet it was not enough. The AIFY partners realized it was time to collaborate and embrace a collective impact approach. Four years later, the partners have proven this way of working together makes sense when it comes to helping socially vulnerable students and their families. Working collectively, schools and community agencies can better support students and their families, meet their needs, and intervene before it's too late. Now, school and community partners can't imagine what they would do without the other.

> *"I don't ever want to think about doing this work without our partners."*
> (School Administrator)

In order to properly and effectively implement this wraparound support model in five AIFY schools, it costs roughly $2.2 million annually, at a cost of $939 per AIFY student enrolled in these schools*. However, there is an expected return on investment of $3 for every $1 spent, conservatively (It could be as much as $15; Brooks Bowden et al., 2020; Malone, 2020; Maier et al., 2017). So, for the last four years, AIFY has spent almost $8.8 million to give students and families access to high quality, wraparound supports in select Edmonton schools. However, the return expected on this four-year investment (based on the conservative return rate from the research literature presented above; $3) is a minimum of $26.4 million, with a $2,817 return expected per AIFY student each year**.

The AIFY school communities have been forever changed as a result of AIFY. Along with the lives of the students and families who have been able to access critical supports through AIFY. The goal moving forward will be to sustain and scale the model in order to extend the benefits to more students and families. This will be hard in the midst of economic and pandemic recovery. However, this is also the time when AIFY supports will prove even more critical to students and families across the province. This model of support will yield returns and will be needed even more in the future, as students and their families work to overcome the challenging times ahead.

> *"it's been a highlight of my career to be involved with this initiative...we kind of dreamed it and then it kind of happened... we called it a demonstration project, because we were really demonstrating what impact [this could] have on a school, based on the research that we already knew. It wasn't like we were introducing new elements in school, [like] success coaches, mentoring, mental health, [nutrition]. We knew all of those were the right elements. Maybe the in-home support, the Roots and Wings was kind of a little bit revolutionary for schools, to actually be concerned about what was going on in the home. Schools tend to be more concerned about what's going on in the school...I think it's been brilliant. And I think that we really have been able to show that this is a model that is needed."*
> (Operations Partner)

AIFY is fully committed to helping students get over the finish line in their educational journeys and ensuring their families can thrive and achieve success at the same time.

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*This cost per student was calculated using the annual cost divided by the total # of students enrolled in the 5 AIFY schools as of September 30th, 2019 (n = 2,343).

**This expected return estimated annually per AIFY student was based on the estimated cost per AIFY student for Year 4 of the initiative (i.e., based on Year 4 school enrolment counts).
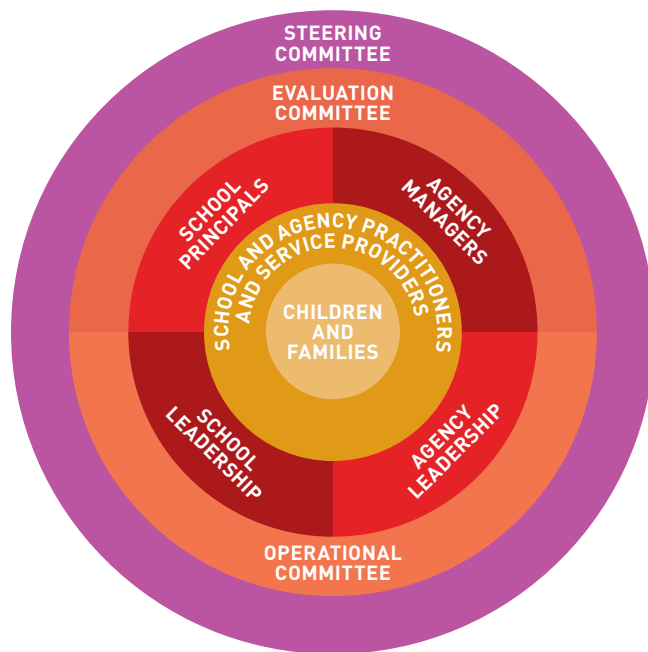
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2016 the AIFY initiative has affected change in the lives of students and families in some of the most vulnerable Edmonton school communities. This change has been created by AIFY's collaborative model of school-based, wraparound supports.

The AIFY Model

AIFY's evidence-based and adaptive model gives schools and practitioners a way to work together more effectively as they support the complex needs of students and families, focusing first on meeting their basic needs and then moving onto higher level needs afterwards (e.g., growth needs like education goals, etc.) **Education alone cannot meet these needs. Giving children and families access to wraparound, school-based supports helps children and their families thrive. In turn, children achieve success in both school and life.**

AIFY is based on research. Based on existing research, we know that wraparound supports,

- can offer the best quality supports to students and families
- be the most economical (in the short- and long-term), and
- be most effective when it comes to producing positive outcomes

To be effective, wraparound supports need to be well-implemented, have time for schools to adopt and integrate supports into their school communities, and meaningfully engage families and communities (Maier et al., 2017). AIFY has implemented a wraparound model of supports for four years and now the AIFY wraparound supports have become an integral piece of each AIFY school community.

Each AIFY school is using best practice, as identified by research, to create the most supportive environments possible for their students and families (Yu, et al., 2020).

AIFY improves access to supports for families in need. Wraparound supports also help close education gaps among students because they are able to provide "immediate and direct solutions to the unique problems of students." (Hill, 2020, pp. 71). Year over year, AIFY has demonstrated its ability to improve access to a range of supports for the students and families that are part of the AIFY school communities. Access that can be severely limited or even inaccessible to students and families when they attempt to seek out community-based supports on their own (e.g., due to numerous and common access barriers, like a lack of knowledge about supports available, restrictions for who can access supports, fees for supports). **The AIFY wraparound model of support is allowing students and families in school communities, including the most complex and hardest to reach, to immediately get connected to practitioners that can ensure they get the support they need.**

AIFY in Action. AIFY provides students and families in school communities with immediate access to critical wraparound supports.

In each AIFY school, the following comprehensive wraparound supports are available to students and their families:

• School nutrition program

• Student and family mental health therapy

• Out-of-school time care

• Student mentoring

• In-home family support

• Student success coaching

These supports and their staff are located in school buildings and staff teams work collaboratively with each other and with school stakeholders (e.g., teachers, school administrators) to deliver these supports. These levels of collaboration help to coordinate service delivery and ensure the AIFY supports are being used to their full potential in each school community. The school is the hub and everyone works together to meet the needs of students and their families. The goal is to get kids over the finish line and complete their schooling as resilient individuals, who have learned how to thrive through adversity. It's also about ensuring families come along to support this journey and be supported throughout as well, if needed.

Since the start of the initiative, AIFY has been able to provide universal supports to over 2,200 students and their families each school year. For the last three years, AIFY has supported approximately 2,784 students across the five AIFY school communities with more targeted supports (e.g., one-on-one counselling, individual student mentoring). On average, this represents 64% of all the students enrolled in the five AIFY schools each year. Also, 38% of these students and their families have accessed the AIFY services for 2 to 3 years.

For Year 4 specifically, the next page has a snapshot of the magnitude and impact of the AIFY work across the five AIFY schools.

NUTRITION SUPPORT

219,996 meals served throughout the school year across all 5 AIFY schools (Sept 2019 to Feb 2020)

250 emergency supplementary food packages provided to families (Sept 2019 to Dec 2019)

1,081 supplementary food packages provided to families during school closures (Post COVID - April 2020 to Aug 2020)

MENTORING

234 Elementary and Junior High students benefited from a mentoring relationship (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

35 Virtual matches made between students and mentors (Post COVID - May 2020 to Aug 2020)

MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY

182 Students and their Family members served as formal clients

9 Presentations

28 Groups facilitated

671 Short-Term Engagements with students and families

SUCCESS COACHING

56 students served as Formal Clients

4,388 Short Term Engagements with 807 students or family members

25 Groups facilitated

56 Critical Incidents supported

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

597 Students served during the school year (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

39 Short-Term Engagements with Students and Families (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

11 Critical Incidents Supported (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

80 Family activity kits provided during school closures (Post COVID - April 2020 to May 2020)

45 Students attended in-person summer programming and 18 attended online (July 2020 to Aug 2020)

ROOTS AND WINGS FAMILY SUPPORT

64 Families Served as Formal Clients

1,436 Short-Term Engagements with 383 individuals from AIFY Families

12 Critical Incidents supported

This visual is presented on page 48 as well. Post-COVID means these activities took place after COVID-19 came to the province and started to impact how schools and agencies could continue operating to serve children, youth, and families.

AIFY was also able to respond the shifting needs of students and families in the AIFY schools when COVID-19 first reached the province and resulted in schools closing and students transitioning to remote learning. The four areas of need that AIFY responded to were food, computers, internet, and wellness checks. Together, AIFY partners continued to coordinate their efforts to ensure these core needs could be met for AIFY student and families during the pandemic. AIFY partners responded in the following ways:

FOOD

1,220 supplementary food packages were made and delivered to AIFY students and families.

COMPUTERS

496 computers were provided to AIFY students and families.

INTERNET ACCESS

AIFY families were provided with Telus internet services at a reduced rate and when needed AIFY partners covered the costs of internet services needed for these families to become or stay connected remotely to schools and services.

WELLNESS CHECKS

520 AIFY families were contacted for wellness checks throughout the pandemic when schools had to physically close and students transitioned to remote learning.

Thousands of phone calls were made to AIFY families during this time to determine families' needs and continue supporting families during this time.

AIFY is also seeing impacts of their work in five key outcome areas:

QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING	**FAMILY SUPPORT**
IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT	**OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUPPORT**	**SYSTEMS CHANGE**

The report will go on to detail the specific impacts seen for each outcome area in Year 4, but overall, we saw how much the AIFY supports were valued and how they are helping change the lives of students and their families.
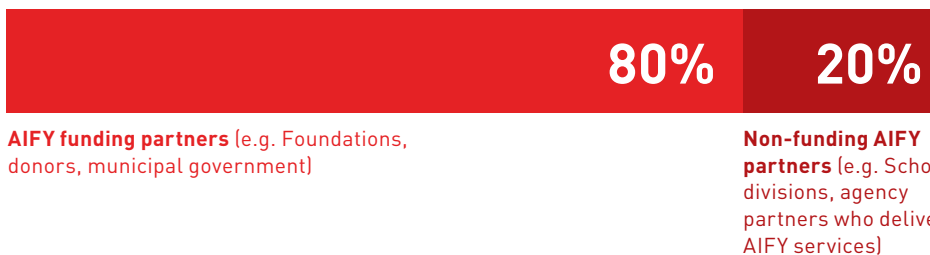
AIFY is led by a collaborative partnership. The following partners are responsible for the collective development, implementation, and current operations of the AIFY initiative:

Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brother Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area (BGCBigs)	Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF)
City of Edmonton, Family and Community Support Services Program	The Family Centre (TFC)
e4c	The Mental Health Foundation
Edmonton Catholic School Division (ECSD)	REACH Edmonton
Edmonton Public Schools	United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

"I am so thankful for the All in For Youth program and how it has helped our family with all their help and support. The teachers and [other] school staff are the best I have experienced" (Parent)

AIFY's return on investment. Unfortunately, wraparound, community-based models of support like the AIFY model are not yet the norm in provincial systems. The AIFY initiative has integrated agency staff teams (comprised of upwards of five full-time staff) into five school communities to provide wraparound supports to student and families at a cost of $2.2 million each year.

For the **five AIFY schools**, it costs **$2.2 million** each year.
For Year 4, this cost was covered by the following . . .

80%	**20%**
AIFY funding partners (e.g. Foundations, donors, municipal government)	**Non-funding AIFY partners** (e.g. School divisions, agency partners who deliver AIFY services)

The research tells us that investing in wraparound models, like AIFY, will yield a

$3 return for every **$1 invested,** conservatively (Brooks Bowden et al., 2020). These returns are expected in increased tax revenue with students in these types of programs as they are expected to earn higher incomes over time, reduced costs for justice systems due to decreased criminality, and reduced spending for government support programs with these students relying less on government social support programs in the future. For AIFY, based on an estimated cost of:

$939 per AIFY student enrolled in these schools, a **$2,817 return** is expected per AIFY student each year.

Also, compared to the cost per student for similar wraparound models integrated into US schools:

AIFY is **$198 cheaper per student**,

also demonstrating the efficiency of this Canadian wrapround support model. AIFY and models like it are not a 'quick-fix' or a 'band-aid' solution, but these models will transform the lives of students and families and provide economic returns in important systems.

AIFY is focused on the future. The AIFY partners are focused on the future and how the AIFY model can continue to grow and evolve to meet the needs of students and families. **The partners will continue to be nimble as they deliver services and will be steadfast in their focus on the wellbeing of children, youth, and families in our city.** As the pandemic demonstrated, the needs of AIFY students and families may shift, but AIFY and its partners will continue to be responsive and are determined to continue meeting the needs of the AIFY students and families.

"[These supports] will reduce the strain on the social system. You will be able to have more productive adults, who will be able to contribute to society instead of take from it. Because it is giving them support to grow." (Parent)

Year ④ EVALUATION DATA SOURCES

The following evaluation data sources inform the Year 4 evaluation findings in this report. Some survey response rates and interview counts were lower than expected for Year 4. In most cases, COVID-19 disrupted some typically used data collection efforts (e.g., evaluators not able to visit schools or attend school events to recruit participants) and because of the impacts of COVID (e.g., increased workloads) fewer participants from some stakeholder groups were able to participate.

FAMILY
Survey
Completed online (May to July 2020) by 39 parents/caregivers from the 5 AIFY schools

SCHOOL
Staff Survey
Completed online (June 2020) by 19 teaching staff from the Edmonton Catholic School Division who work at one of the AIFY schools (Does not represent all the teaching staff working in this school or the other AIFY schools for Year 4)

AGENCY
Staff Survey
Completed online (June 2020) by 20 AIFY agency staff (out of 23 agency staff working in the AIFY schools)

AGENCY
Leader Survey
Completed online (June 2020) by 10 AIFY Agency Leaders (i.e., Managers and Supervisors; out of 10 Agency Leaders working in the AIFY schools)

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

3
Students interviewed

17
Parents/Caregivers interviewed

10
Operations Partners Interviewed

9
Steering Committee Partners Interviewed

5
School Administrators Interviewed (From 4 AIFY schools)

SECONDARY DATA FROM AGENCY PARTNERS
AIFY Service Delivery Data for all 5 AIFY schools (e.g., # of students accessing AIFY supports, information about service adaptations due to the pandemic)

EXISTING RESEARCH LITERATURE
Peer-Reviewed literature and Grey literature gathered to support Year 4 evaluation findings (e.g., research literature about the effectiveness of wraparound models of support, reports released about the Impacts of COVID on Canadian children, youth, and families)

SECONDARY DATA FROM SCHOOL PARTNERS

Student Resiliency Survey Completed in schools (October 2019) by 1,244 Grade 4 to 12 students across the 4 AIFY schools

AIFY School Data (e.g., Student demographics for AIFY schools, high social vulnerability ranking data for each AIFY school)

DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW
Meeting notes from AIFY meetings held during the 2019-2020 school year (e.g., agency meetings to coordinate service delivery to AIFY schools during the start and throughout the pandemic)

Documents shared by AIFY partners about the AIFY work during the 2019-2020 school year (e.g., document about service delivery during the pandemic)

AIFY:
Year 4
IMPACTS

AIFY:
Year ④ IMPACTS AT A GLANCE

QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

- ✅ School Staff feel more support in schools
- ✅ School Staff are able to focus on teaching and learning in schools
- ✅ Positive relationships between schools and agencies are maintained
- ✅ School Staff in each AIFY school use trauma-informed practices
- ✅ Decreased School Staff turnover in AIFY schools

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- ✅ Positive relationships maintained with caring adults out-of-school (e.g., adult mentors)
- ✅ More external community partners involved in the AIFY work
- ✅ Student and family out-of-school needs are met
- ✅ Building Civic Engagement in Students and Families

FAMILY SUPPORT

- ✅ Decreased feelings of isolation among caregivers
- ✅ Improved parental capacity (e.g., more confidence)
- ✅ Improvements to family mental health
- ✅ Improved family relationships
- ✅ Increased food security
- ✅ Positive relationships are maintained between family members and caring adults in the school
- ✅ Families' needs are met (e.g., basic needs, financial)

SYSTEMS CHANGE

- ✅ AIFY partner relationships maintained
- ✅ More schools want to implement AIFY in their school communities
- ✅ Improved access to supports for students and families (e.g., barriers to access removed)
- ✅ AIFY partners working differently (with each other and internally) and influencing how others are working together

IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- ✅ Students have the intention to complete high school
- ✅ Improved attendance
- ✅ Successful school transitions for students
- ✅ Improved student reading ability
- ✅ Improved student mental health
- ✅ Decreased student truancy
- ✅ Improved student behavior

- ✅ Positive relationships maintained between students and caring adults in the school
- ✅ Student needs are met (e.g., basic needs, transportation, nutrition)
- ✅ Improved academic performance
- ✅ Improved social skills
- ✅ Improved peer relationships

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AIFY:
Year 4 IMPACTS

To help identify and track impacts of the AIFY work across the years, AIFY partners developed a logic model to map out expected impacts and outcomes of the AIFY work in the Short-term (First 1 to 2 years), Mid-term (in 3 to 5 years), and Long-term (in 6 – 10 years). These outcomes are also organized by the 5 outcome areas AIFY identified when they developed the AIFY model of support: Quality Teaching and Learning, Family Support, In-School Support, Out-of-School Support, Systems Change.

This section of the report presents the Year 4 (Mid-term) impacts and outcomes of AIFY for each outcome area. Since Year 3, many of the projected mid-term outcomes are being achieved. However, there are some expected mid-term outcomes we were not able to demonstrate in Year 4 due to disruptions in evaluation data collection because of the pandemic and AIFY school closures. Therefore, all the Year 4 mid-term outcomes presented are supported by evaluation data we were able to collect for Year 4. We also present some mid-term outcomes that were unexpected (e.g., emerged as a result of the pandemic and school closures).

✅ = Expected Mid-Term Outcome

✅+ = Unexpected Mid-Term Outcome

Outcomes are illustrated through qualitative data (interviews/focus groups with AIFY stakeholders) and quantitative data (stakeholder survey data, secondary data from AIFY partners). Data presented in this report are considered exemplars of the occurrence of an impact/outcome, but is not the complete picture of all the evaluation data.

QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING	School staff are able to focus on and be supported in their teaching and learning objectives with students and families

IN THE LIT:

Having wraparound social supports present in schools allows teachers to access valuable knowledge and resources from agencies. As a result, teachers report that they are more patient with students, the amount of stress they experience decreases, and they concentrate more on teaching and academics (Sibley et al. 2017). Further, Ouellette et al. (2018) explain that the school environment is one key factor in eliminating teacher stress and increasing contentment in schools. Consequently, both of these studies suggest that having wraparound supports and various agencies present in vulnerable schools contributes to an improved school environment (Sibley et al., 2017; Ouellette et al. 2018). As well, teachers involved in wraparound, collaborative models report less emotional exhaustion, greater personal achievement, and an improved teaching environment (Valli, Stefanski & Jacobson, 2016), and these types of models of support gives them the freedom to focus on teaching students (Quinn & Dryfoos, 2009). With wraparound models of support in schools, educators have also reported they are more aware of effective strategies to use with students with complex and diverse needs, they had a greater understanding of how non-academic issues influenced students, and were better able to consider all the different factors that could be influencing student behaviour (City Connects, 2020). Overall, many educators usually feel supported by the personnel and resources provided by wraparound, school-based supports.

NOTE:

In the report, when we say school closures, this means the time in Year 4 when schools in Alberta were provincially mandated to physically close their buildings to students and families, due to COVID-19, in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. School buildings were no longer accessible to students and their families, but school Divisions shifted to emergent remote learning so students could continue learning and connecting to schools during this time. Divisions and their educators continued to work with their students and families during school closures, when the school building was no longer physically accessible. During school closures, students and families also continued to have access to the supports offered by their schools and divisions. This included the AIFY supports that were delivered to students and families in the AIFY schools. Service delivery did not stop during school closures and agencies adpated their service delivery models as often as needed and as quickly as possible to ensure students and their families were still able to connect to supports as needed.

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✅ **School Staff feel more support in schools**

84%

(n = 16) of ECSD School Staff reported that they had more support to help them understand students' behaviours (e.g., why they act out?).

100%

(n = 19) of ECSD School Staff reported that the AIFY supports and agency staff are able to help them support students and their families with their complex needs.

"I just have to say how grateful I am for the support that we have from All In For Youth and for having those wraparound services in the building, because now, more than ever, we see how crucial they are....Knowing that we have our All In For Youth staff, and they're integrated so well into our teaching staff and our support staff, and it's just a great blessing... the team that we have built here is ready to take on a number of pretty complex issues." (School Administrator)

"For our [school] staff, I think they appreciate everything the All in For Youth team does to support the kids and families in their room." (School Administrator)

✅ **School Staff are able to focus on teaching and learning in schools**

"They (AIFY staff) are able to be more persistent with families than I am able to be. I appreciate their abilities to reach out to families." (ECSD School Staff)

"... our All in For Youth team, they're such an important part ... because ... their relationships with kids are what helped to regulate them (the kids) to get them back into the learning." (School Administrator)

✅ **Positive relationships between schools and agencies are maintained**

90%

(n = 17) of ECSD School Staff reported that they felt comfortable sharing their opinions (e.g., about students, families, etc.) with the AIFY agency staff that worked at their school.

74%

(n = 14) of ECSD School Staff reported that they had opportunities to contribute to the AIFY work (e.g., share their expertise/knowledge about students and families)

80%

(n = 8) of Agency Leaders reported that schools and agencies involved in the AIFY work are collaborating successfully.

"I believe that we have an awesome school community with staff and partners that really care and go above and beyond to support our families." (Agency Staff)

"Anytime they have had questions or concerns about a family they are quick to reach out to discuss concerns. So mainly keeping open communication which in turn ends up being a positive partnership." (Agency Staff)

✅ **School Staff in each AIFY school use trauma-informed practices**

68%

(n = 13) of ECSD School Staff reported that their attitudes about students' disruptive behavior has changed. This is an 18% increase from Year 3.

68%

(n = 13) of ECSD School Staff reported that their instructional strategies have changed *(e.g., changes made to meet the needs of students/ families). This is an 11% increase from Year 3.*

"Our staff has learned so much from working with them and many teachers are SO much more trauma informed than they were prior to AIFY working in our school." (ECSD School Staff)

✅ **Decreased School Staff turnover in AIFY schools**

"My staff have been incredible, like just incredible. We've lost no one. And we had no staff turnover for my school-based staff." (School Administrator)

FAMILY SUPPORT

Families have access to supports in schools that contribute to their overall wellbeing and are able to build skills to maintain healthy family functioning over time.

IN THE LIT:

The challenges experienced by children, youth, and families impact the whole family, and thus addressing the needs of children and youth requires a family-centered approach and collaboration between families, schools, and social service agencies in the community. (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Interventions are more powerful when families are involved and supported, and that family members should have a voice in the services provided to them (Powell, Batsche, Ferro, Fox, & Dunlap, 1997).

✓ **Decreased feelings of isolation among caregivers**

"They have been calling us by telephone. But also [they] have been sending me emails and they have emailed me for online programs. And also...they are offering parenting sessions...and I have participated in them. And I think they are really important, and [it's] really good that they are doing that." (Parent)

✓ **Improved parental capacity (e.g., more confidence)**

"they gave me that support and that confidence like you know - you're doing good... you know ... that knowledge... [that] everything's going to be okay." (Parent)

"... I feel...supported and with the parenting sessions...[Sometimes] I feel like I'm the only one dealing with things and then you realize oh no, like everybody else or multiple parents are dealing with similar stuff, so you feel like supported with that." (Parent)

✓ **Improvements to family mental health**

- **75% of AIFY clients (students and/or family members) experienced improvement in their mental health after working with a mental health therapist during the year**
- **Across the 5 AIFY schools, the Treatment Impact for the Mental Health Therapists was 73%**

  - Formal Clients (students and families) of the mental health therapists in the AIFY schools use an outcome rating scale to evaluate the service provided by the therapist, this measure produces a 'Treatment Impact' score. It is important to note that the industry standard of treatment impact for mental health therapists is set at 50%.

"It's very, very beneficial to the mental health [of] all three of us." (Parent)

✓ **Improved family relationships**

- **58% (n = 31) of parent/caregiver responses indicated they felt their relationship with their children has improved**

"They've been intrinsic in keeping our family from shattering." (Parent)

"it allows me to be more open to allowing my kids to communicate. Instead of trying to enforce my thoughts and values on them, I can try and see things from their perspective and find a... compromise point." (Parent)

✓ **Increased food security**

- **Students and families that are part of the AIFY school communities had better access to food supports through a universally accessible school nutrition program in each of the 5 AIFY schools**

70%

of the AIFY school populations, on average, were accessing the e4c school nutrition program from September 2020 to March 2020, with 1,130 students fed per month

250

emergency supplementary food packages were provided to families in Year 4, from September to December

1,081 ✓

supplementary food packages were provided by e4c to AIFY families from April to August, while schools were closed

139 ✓+

supplementary food packages were provided by BGCBigs to AIFY families while schools were closed in April and May

382 ✓+

supplementary food packages were distributed by TFC agency staff

"They have gotten me food hampers all through the COVID." (Parent)

"... once they went back to [school], it was like they were changed kids... they loved the lunch program... That's another program that my kids are a part of... they love it and the snacks that come along with the lunch program... and it's all healthy..." (Parent)

✓ **Positive relationships are maintained between family members and caring adults in the school**

- **79% (n = 15) of ECSD schools staff reported they have stronger relationships with families in the school community.**

"I think that it's nice to be able to just... pick up a phone and call your school and be able to talk to them and there's no judgement..." (Parent)

"... listening was a big thing... not even just to listen but like really connect- be like you know, "I understand, I hear what you're saying." (Parent)

"You can tell they really care about kids and they want the best for them. Like even... after school and even right now with the pandemic, they have been reaching out. They have talked to us- So... me and my daughter, we feel like we are important to them. And they really care." (Parent)

✓+ **Families' needs are met (e.g., basic needs, financial)**

69%

(n = 27) of parents/caregivers said that when they need help, they see the school as a source of support

78%

(n = 29) of parents/caregivers said they are happy with the quality of support the receive from the school

- **When the pandemic hit and closed schools, ensured families had their basic needs met in the areas of food, technology, internet, and wellness checks**

1,220

supplementary food packages were made and delivered to AIFY students and families

496

computers were provided to AIFY students and families

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AIFY families were provided with Telus internet services at a reduced rate and when needed AIFY partners covered the costs of internet services needed for these families to become or stay connected remotely to schools and services

520

AIFY families were contacted for wellness checks throughout the pandemic to ensure families' needs were being identified and met (many of these families were identified and contacted based on higher levels of vulnerability and risk)

"… the school is very… helpful for not only students, but parents. They…are able to help you out with food hampers, they're able to help you out with… so many things. You just gotta call them and tell them what you need and they will try their very best to help you." (Parent)

"So, I keep repeating this to so many people but…being mom and a teacher it's really hard and I just want to go back to being a mom- but I can't (because of the pandemic)… I don't even have the words to explain how grateful I am for [the school]. They were always there when I needed, a phone call right away. They were always there to support me through you know the lessons. They were always there to explain if I had any questions, if there were any concerns or any fears or if I was just stressed out, they were always, always there. So, I really appreciate that." (Parent)

IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT

Students have access to supports in school that contribute to their overall wellbeing and help them build skills to achieve school success.

IN THE LIT:

Wraparound supports in schools are critical because they provide a wide range of services that specifically address students' academic, social, physical, and mental health needs (Miranda et al., 2018). In-school supports that address these needs also tend to provide students and families an opportunity to connect with caring adults in the school community. For vulnerable youth, having a strong and positive relationship with a caring adult protects them from negative, health-related outcomes and promotes positive developmental outcomes, including the development of social skills and school competence (Sieving et al., 2017). These type of wraparound and collaborative supports address the complex needs of students and families, improves school environments, supports student learning, and fosters community growth (Kim, 2017; Warren, 2005). Supports are also personalized where students' and families' strengths are identified and supported to help them improve upon any issues they may have in their life. For example, Fries et al. (2012) reported that in-school wraparound supports were key in preventing students from dropping out of high school. This exemplar shows how wraparound supports provided by schools can address personal, academic, and home-life issues, which allows for students to reconnect with their educational aspirations as their life became more stable after accessing critical supports from the school.

✓ **Students have the intention to complete high school**

- 96% (n = 1141) of students in grade 4 to 12 said they plan to complete high school on the Year 4 resiliency survey.

✓ **Improved attendance**

- 58% (n = 32) of Parent/Caregiver responses indicated they felt their child's attendance had improved in Year 3.

✓ **Successful school transitions for students**

- Every year, AIFY is focused on helping students prepare for their upcoming school transitions since these transitions can be difficult for some students, especially students who experience more vulnerabilities. Specifically, agency staff work with Grade 5 and 6 AIFY students to help prepare them for their transition to grade 7 (e.g., younger students get the chance to connect with grade 7 students to find out what to expect from junior high). They also work with grade 9 AIFY students to prepare them for their transition to grade 10 (e.g., help students learn about different high school programs in the city, help students decide which high school would be a good fit for them based on their needs).

  - 86% (of grade 6 students (n = 107) at the AIFY schools successfully transitioned to Grade 7 within their respective school Divisions.
  - 75% of grade 9 students (n = 114) at the AIFY schools successfully transitioned to Grade 10 within their respective school Divisions.
  - Students left their respective school Divisions after Grade 6 and 9, and could not be tracked, but they may have successfully transitioned into Grade 7/10 in another school Division.

✓ **Improved student reading ability**

- 57% (n = 31) of Parents/Caregivers said their children's reading has improved *(based on parent/caregiver survey responses for 54 children in the AIFY schools)*

"… So, he's doing really well but he was …starting to slip in certain subjects because … he didn't want to focus… But now after…we talked with his big brother (mentor) …just [to] kind of help him work on things to stay focused and that seems to really help …they sit there, and they do certain little activities and he helps him just stay focused on one activity you know…that has really

helped ... it's definitely made a difference in his reading, his mathematics he's very good in, but his reading, he doesn't want to sit down and read and that was one of those things that they had worked on a little bit and [it] definitely- definitely improved." (Parent)

✅ **Improved student mental health**

"There's a been lot of positive changes... for instance... when my youngest...came back from their dad's house, he was an emotional rollercoaster... he was taking knives from not only my house but his father's ... saying he was going to kill himself in the bathroom. The whole nine yards... they helped me change that train of thought with him. Where I was having a hard time because I'm his comfort zone, where he could show the way he felt with anything. [The School Administrator] actually kept [their] cellphone on for the next four days after [this happened] so we can get him the help he needs, right. He was out [of school] for five days. [The Principal] kept [their] work phone on day and night for me...Just to help me through it. [They] were calling me three four times a night, every night...[They were] very, very much there for us." (Parent)

✅ **Decreased student truancy**

"...there's been less suspensions [for my child]." (Parent)

✅ **Improved student behavior**

57%
of parent/caregiver responses (n = 31) indicated they think their children's behavior in school has improved.

59%
of parent/caregiver responses (n = 32) indicated they think their children's behavior at home has improved.

"...he tends to have some kind of anger issues here and there, so these programs really benefit him especially (Parent)

✅ **Positive relationships maintained between students and caring adults in the school**

79%
(n = 17) of ECSD school staff said they have stronger relationships with students

78%
(n= 907) of Grade 4 to 12 students said there are positive caring role models in the schools they can go to for support/guidance/encouragement/advice.

90%
(n = 1045) of Grade 4 to 12 students said there is an adult in the school they can go to for help with a problem.

"a lot of kids don't have any adults who are interested, so to have this whole structure of adults who cared about them I think was amazing" (Parent)

"They've become very like close to the therapist that they see all the time. They've become somebody that they trust and they can just go talk to about anything." (Parent)

"...having a large family there's situations that are bound to arise in the family and there's tensions built. And knowing that there's somebody [at the school] that my kids can talk to and that support [them]...it was just a peace of mind for me." (Parent)

✅ **Student needs are met (e.g., basic needs, transportation, nutrition)**

• **86% (n = 32) of parent/caregivers said they are happy with the quality of support their children receive from the school.**

"That is where they thrive. They thrive at that school. They give them the support they need. They have all...that they need." (Parent)

Improved academic performance

85%
(n = 46) of Parents/Caregivers said their children were more engaged in school *(based on parent/caregiver survey responses for 54 children in the AIFY schools)*

75%
(n = 41) of Parents/Caregivers said their children's ability to learn has improved *(based on parent/caregiver survey responses for 55 children in the AIFY schools)*

"...they've been invested in his future and I don't really think any other school would do that...he's been to a couple different schools and...no one's ever really done that for him and I think that's really important ...they seem to genuinely care about his future and academically ... emotionally and out in the real world and... he learns more every day at school than I think he does anywhere else for sure...I'm really happy that he's where he should be." (Parent)

"I will definitely say though that because he has the support at [the school] his marks are improving 100%...they are not as bad as they could [be] because he has people that believe in him...when he gets frustrated and he gives up on something because he can't focus, or he can't do this, or he can't do that. They don't give up on him..." (Parent)

Improved social skills

"She was really shy and really quiet. And now I can see ... she's more open." (Parent)

Improved peer relationships

"...he had an issue with kind of making friends so- he got to now kind of work more with students and stuff." (Parent)

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUPPORT | *Students and families have access to out-of-school supports (e.g., after school programming, summer programming, community programs) that contribute to their overall wellbeing and help them to build skills to achieve success in life.*

IN THE LIT:

Research shows that community-based after school programs have the potential to transform youth behaviors and attitudes (Abuya et al. 2019). They also give children and youth the opportunity to establish long-term, consistent relationships with caring adults, which is linked to improved grades, having better family relationships, and reduced drug and alcohol use (Abuya et al. 2019). Additionally, after-school programming can also contribute to students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral success (Abuya et al. 2019). For example, youth who attend after-school programming tend to experience more self-confidence, higher self-esteem, more positive feelings about school, healthy social behaviors, as well as greater academic achievement. After-school programming also gives previously unsupervised students, who may end up engaging in risky behaviours, a safe place to spend time with peers, promotes social-emotional development, gives children access to new experiences and enrichment opportunities (McCombs et al., 2018). In addition, caregivers also benefit from out-of-school and after-school programming. For instance, caregivers often build relationships with support staff and can reach out to staff for additional support if needed.

✅ Positive relationships maintained with caring adults out-of-school (e.g., adult mentors)

- **234 elementary and junior high students in the AIFY schools benefited from a mentoring relationship**

- In particular, there were 23 community-based mentoring matches during Year 4

✅ More external community partners involved in the AIFY work

- **Each AIFY school continues to engage with many other external community partners to help deliver programs to students and/or to connect families to additional resources.**
    - Some of these external community partners are Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, Change Health Alberta, Ballet Edmonton, Kids4Cameras, Toy Mountain, MHK Insurance, Explore at NAIT, Level 12 Marketing, Kid Sport, Canadian Tire Jumpstart, Edmonton Public Library, RBC

- **During the pandemic, when schools were closed from mid-March to June, AIFY partners continued to reach out and connect with external community partners to help ensure the students and families in the AIFY schools could continue support for their needs during school closures (e.g., internet access, food support).**
    - Some of these external community partners students and families were connected to for additional support was The Food Bank, Telus, Caregivers Alberta, Stollery Children's Hospital, Triple P Parenting, Jewish Family Services, Muttart Foundation, anonymous donor

"So that as well as the partnership with Telus and their low internet cost- the ten dollars per month for three months kind of thing, that partnership" (Steering Partner)

✅ Student and family out-of-school needs are met

"I was having a really hard time with after school babysitting. Finding somebody that was an after-school caregiver, so [OST] really, really helped for me on that aspect- [my kids] went there a couple of times a week." (Parent)

"...giving them opportunities to do really cool field trips and everything. Like that stuff didn't have to come out of my pocket. And I have huge family so that made a huge difference to us over the years." (Parent)

"... often in once a month we are getting some activity kit from the school for a week... because he is a staying at home (due to the pandemic)...we get the activity kits and they have ...something for [my child] to do." (Parent)

✅ When the pandemic physically closed the AIFY schools, AIFY partners worked together to ensure the AIFY students and families could still access supports needed during this time. Students and families were reporting needs like food assistance, activity support for children, technology assistance, employment support, support for high school completion, support for completion of post-secondary applications, help filling out paperwork for supports, mental health support, child minding.

✅ AIFY partners would support students and families with these needs using their existing capacity or by seeking out additional capacity and resources through external community partners.

✅ Building Civic Engagement in Students and Families

"In the coming year, I plan on getting more involved with the school. And maybe doing the, you know, parent teacher program they have there and trying to be more involved" (Parent)

"She feels like she belongs with other people and also she's learning. And she have told me that she wants to do some kind of programs later when she's older, like she wants to be a volunteer and she wants to help other kids. So, I think that's good. Putting that seed in the kids. That's later gonna pay off." (Parent)

SYSTEMS CHANGE

The collaborative efforts of the partnership contribute to changes in current operating systems (e.g., schools, government sectors, social service industries) that allow the complex needs of students and families in the school communities to be more effectively and efficiently met.

IN THE LIT:

Community-school partnerships have the potential to be catalyst for much needed community systems change (Bartlett & Freeze, 2018). Developmental researchers have long advocated for a strong overlap between children's home, school, and community environments, which can result in environments that are more conducive to children's learning and growth (Epstein, 1987). When agencies collaborate with schools, there are a number of perceived benefits. These benefits include stronger service delivery, such as earlier detection of problems and more appropriate referrals. As well, agency-school collaboration is thought to result in better outcomes for students, whereby children are happier, show improved academic achievement, and better school attendance (Cooper, Evans, & Pybis, 2016). In addition, community involvement within educational settings allows for agency staff and external personnel to provide expertise, resources, and knowledge to educators that can help in planning, intervention, and in improving the lives of students and their families (Shasby & Schneck, 2011).

✓ **AIFY partner relationships maintained**

- Not only were the AIFY partner relationships maintained in Year 4, but partners were also able to see how their strong relationships with one another allowed them to pivot and respond more quickly when the pandemic hit. It was already established trust that helped AIFY partners work together so well during the pandemic.

"I think the turn around and the quick change into an online service delivery or you know modified service delivery, I think it happened very quickly because of the established relationships and communication and everything. It was just that foundation was already there. That allowed it to change very quickly." (Steering Partner)

"I think the relationships were key. We don't function as five or six individual entities. We function as an entity in and of itself." (Operations Partner)

✓ **More schools want to implement AIFY in their school communities**

"I would love to at some point say okay Edmonton [School Division] pick another ten schools. We're ready to go" (Steering Partner)

✓ **Improved access to supports for students and families (e.g., barriers to access removed)**

"...incredibly impressed with our partners and how they were able to adjust how they delivered programs that were in the schools before." (Steering Partner)

"So, you know running groups virtually, having people come together that way, individuals, families. Phone counselling has proven to be so valuable to people. We've always done it. But it's also families getting used to it and us getting used to it. So yeah, that proved, and youth love it. So, there were lots of pieces that we'll just keep doing as we go forward." (Steering Partner)

✓ **AIFY partners working differently (with each other and internally) and influencing how others are working together**

"When you want to talk about the impact of the All In For Youth team...because of the supports and how we've seen people work [together], we actually started something new this year. We actually started a new role in our school...He's our first black cultural liaison and graduation coach, specific for our black youth. We're the only school in Edmonton that's got that going on right now. And it's amazing, the work that he's doing in connecting with our black youth...about 25% to 30% of our students ... would be of black ancestry, and we wanted to try to look at how we could model a similar kind of program and so we made that investment. And I'll tell you, it's

been a really great complement, because now we have three coaches to support our Indigenous youth, one person that's supporting our black youth, plus our All In For Youth that are wrapping around everybody. It's pretty cool... We were really looking at, "How are we able to connect with our black youth and our black community?" ... and if it wasn't for having the supports of the All In For Youth, we really wouldn't necessarily have known that the power of what could be done at this age level." (School Administrator)

"... what our partners have really demonstrated is that they continue to think about what's best for our kids and families within this new environment and having to work differently" (Operations Partner)

"Well, I think that we are multi-disciplined. We come from different places. That we have different expertise. We have different experience. We have different capacities. I think we are smarter together than we are separate" (Steering Partner)

The AIFY
SCHOOL
COMMUNITIES

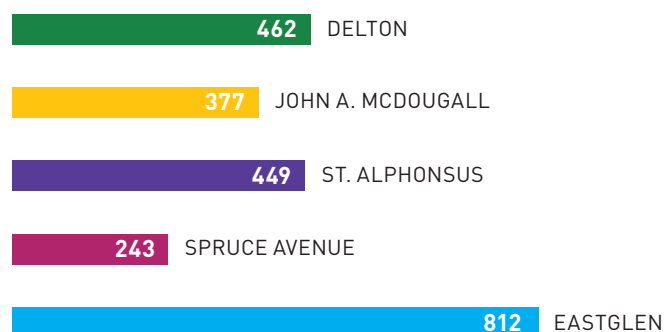# The AIFY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

There are 5 AIFY Schools in Central Edmonton:

- **Delton Elementary School** (Pre-K to Grade 6)
- **John A. McDougall Elementary School** (Pre-K to Grade 6)
- **St. Alphonsus Elementary/Junior High** (Pre-K to Grade 9)
- **Spruce Avenue Junior High** (Grade 7 to 9)
- **Eastglen High School** (Grade 10 – 12)

Demographic Characteristics of The AIFY School Communities

In Year 4 (2019/2020 school year), approximately **2,343 students and their families** were part of these five AIFY school communities (i.e., all students and their families, not just students and families who access targeted AIFY supports). *(↑112 students and their families from Y3)*

AIFY SCHOOLS: Y4 STUDENT ENROLMENT

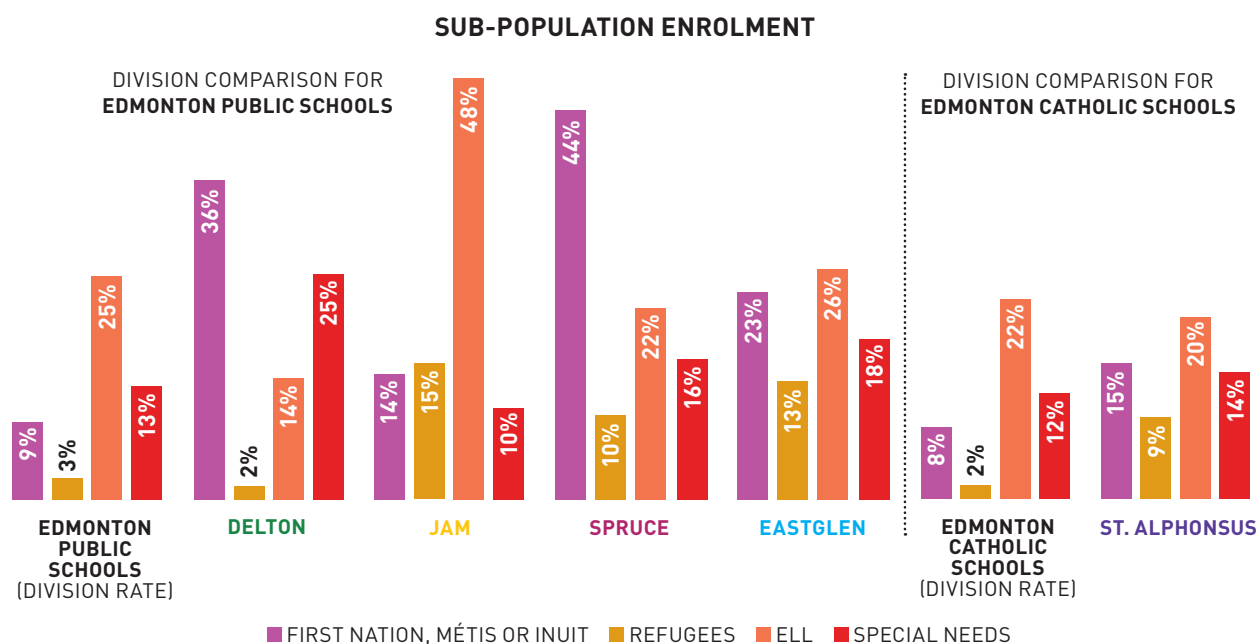|	
462	DELTON
377	JOHN A. MCDOUGALL
449	ST. ALPHONSUS
243	SPRUCE AVENUE
812	EASTGLEN

For Year 4, each of the AIFY schools also saw their overall enrolment counts increase from the previous year (Increases ranging from 4 to 58 students; based on September enrolment counts). Among the students in these school communities, many represent English language learners (ELL), refugees, self-identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, and students with special needs (There may also be some overlap in students who identify with each of these sub-groups).

17%	SPECIAL NEEDS
26%	ELL
10%	REFUGEES
26%	FIRST NATION, MÉTIS OR INUIT
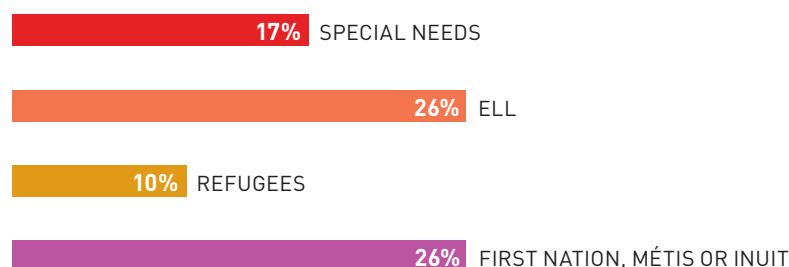
This chart presents the proportion of students from all five AIFY schools who have special needs, are ELL, are refugees, and who are self-identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.

Compared to Division averages, the AIFY schools also tend to have higher proportions of these specific student populations. For example, the following chart demonstrates this unique feature of the AIFY schools from the Edmonton Public School Division and the Edmonton Catholic School Division.
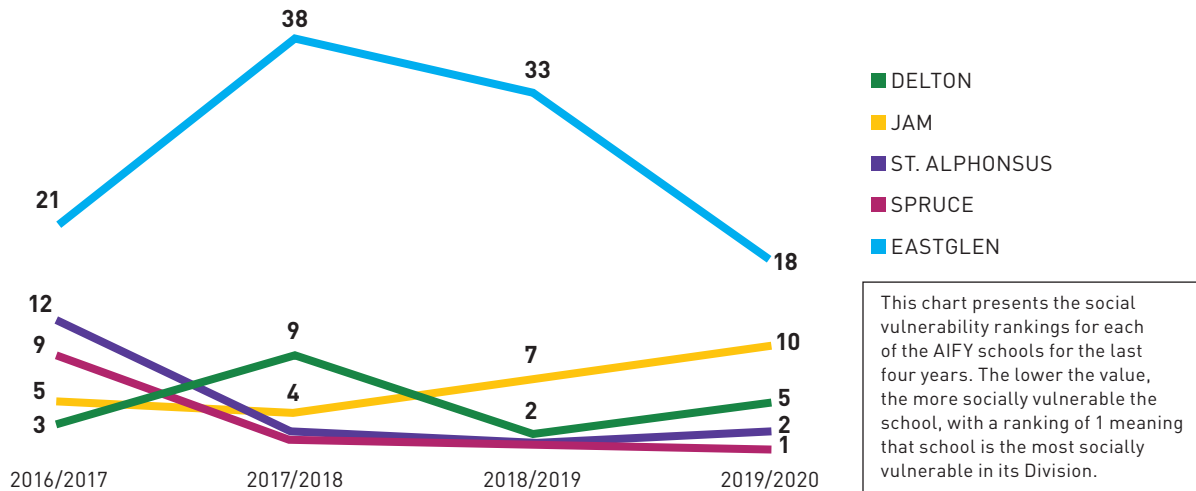
SUB-POPULATION ENROLMENT

DIVISION COMPARISON FOR **EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

DIVISION COMPARISON FOR **EDMONTON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DIVISION RATE): First Nation, Métis or Inuit 9%, Refugees 3%, ELL 25%, Special Needs 13%

DELTON: First Nation, Métis or Inuit 36%, Refugees 2%, ELL 14%, Special Needs 25%

JAM: First Nation, Métis or Inuit 14%, Refugees 15%, ELL 48%, Special Needs 10%

SPRUCE: First Nation, Métis or Inuit 44%, Refugees 10%, ELL 22%, Special Needs 16%

EASTGLEN: First Nation, Métis or Inuit 23%, Refugees 13%, ELL 26%, Special Needs 18%

EDMONTON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS (DIVISION RATE): First Nation, Métis or Inuit 8%, Refugees 2%, ELL 22%, Special Needs 12%

ST. ALPHONSUS: First Nation, Métis or Inuit 15%, Refugees 9%, ELL 20%, Special Needs 14%

■ FIRST NATION, MÉTIS OR INUIT   ■ REFUGEES   ■ ELL   ■ SPECIAL NEEDS

For the most part, all of the AIFY schools tend to have much higher proportions of these specific student populations, compared to their respective Division rates. In particular:

- All four Edmonton Public AIFY schools have notably higher proportions of self-identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, with Delton and Spruce Avenue having the largest proportions of these students (at more than 3X the rate of the Division average).

- For ELL students, JAM has almost double the proportion of these students, compared to the Division average.

- Delton, Spruce Avenue, and Eastglen have a higher proportion of students with special needs, compared to the Division average. Delton in particular has a high proportion of students with Special Needs, with nearly 1/3 of its student population made up of students with special needs.

- St. Alphonsus has higher proportions of self- identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students and refugee students, compared to their Division average (almost 2X the rate of self- identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students and refugee students and more than 3X the rate of Refugee students).

These demographic data for the AIFY schools provide a few examples of the layers of complexity in these school communities. Another layer of complexity to consider for the AIFY schools is their social vulnerability. Each Division (Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic Schools) rank their 60 most socially vulnerable schools (i.e., based on school mobility, median household income in school neighbourhoods, the number of lone parent families in the school neighbourhood). **For the last three years, four out of the five AIFY schools have been in the top 10 of the most socially vulnerable schools in their Division,** with Spruce Avenue and St. Alphonsus both ranking as the most socially vulnerable schools in their Division at least once in the last two years. Also, Eastglen high school, which tends to be ranked as less socially vulnerable,

compared to the other AIFY schools, has seen its social vulnerability ranking notably decline over the last two years, meaning this school community is becoming more and more socially vulnerable. **Also, compared to other high schools in the Edmonton Public School Division, Eastglen is the most socially vulnerable school in the Division each year.**

HIGH SOCIAL VULNERABILITY RANKINGS: 4 YEAR TREND FOR AIFY SCHOOLS

■ DELTON
■ JAM
■ ST. ALPHONSUS
■ SPRUCE
■ EASTGLEN

This chart presents the social vulnerability rankings for each of the AIFY schools for the last four years. The lower the value, the more socially vulnerable the school, with a ranking of 1 meaning that school is the most socially vulnerable in its Division.

Each of the AIFY schools also experience a lot of transiency in their school communities, with many students and families moving in and out of their school communities at many different times throughout the school year. Some movement of students and their families in and out of school communities is expected, but the school mobility rates for the Edmonton Public AIFY schools are much higher than their Division average (school mobility rates were not available for St. Alphonsus and the Edmonton Catholic School Division). For example, Spruce Avenue school has a mobility rate of 48% for the 2019/2020 school year, which is 30% higher than the Edmonton Public Division average of 18%. The AIFY schools with mobility rate data have consistently had higher rates than their Division average for the last two years.

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS MOBILITY RATES: AIFY SCHOOLS AND DIVISION COMPARISON

18% DIVISION
25% DELTON
34% JOHN A. MCDOUGALL
48% SPRUCE AVENUE
20% EASTGLEN
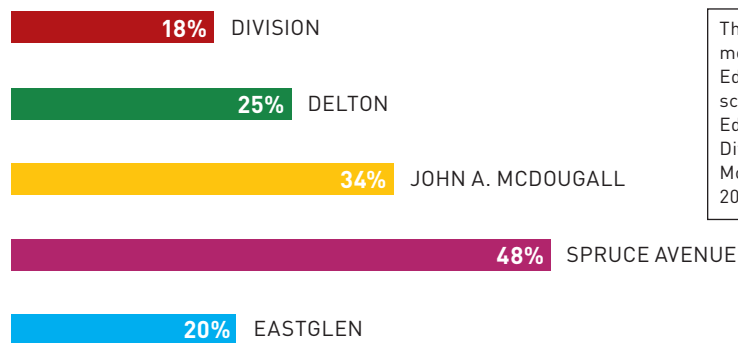
This chart presents the mobility rate for the four Edmonton Public AIFY schools, along with the Edmonton Public Schools Division mobility rate. Mobility Rates are for the 2019/2020 school year.

As another layer of complexity experienced by the students and families in the AIFY school communities, there are a number of reasons families in the AIFY schools have the tendency to move around a lot (e.g., seeking out different housing, moving for work, experiencing crisis). This increased mobility and transiency also makes it more difficult for the schools to address the needs of its students and/or families and help them consistently access the supports they need.

IN THE **LIT:**

Moving more frequently is associated with an increase in behavioural problems (e.g., drug use, teenage pregancy) and emotional problems (e.g., loneliness, depression) in adolescents (Jelleyman & Spencer, 2008). Also, a recent study also found that a higher number of residential moves is associated with more deliquency and educational problems among boys (Schmidt, Krohn, & Osypuk, 2018).

The Mental Health of AIFY School Communities

Another important layer of complexity to be aware of in the AIFY school communities is the mental health complexities students and families are trying to address and cope with in their lives. Data from the AIFY mental health therapists, who support the five AIFY schools, shows us the range of complexities AIFY students and families have been living with. From depression and anxiety, to domestic violence, to addiction issues, there are many different complexities related to students' and families' mental health in the AIFY school communities.

TYPES OF COMPLEXITIES EXPERIENCED BY FORMAL CLIENTS
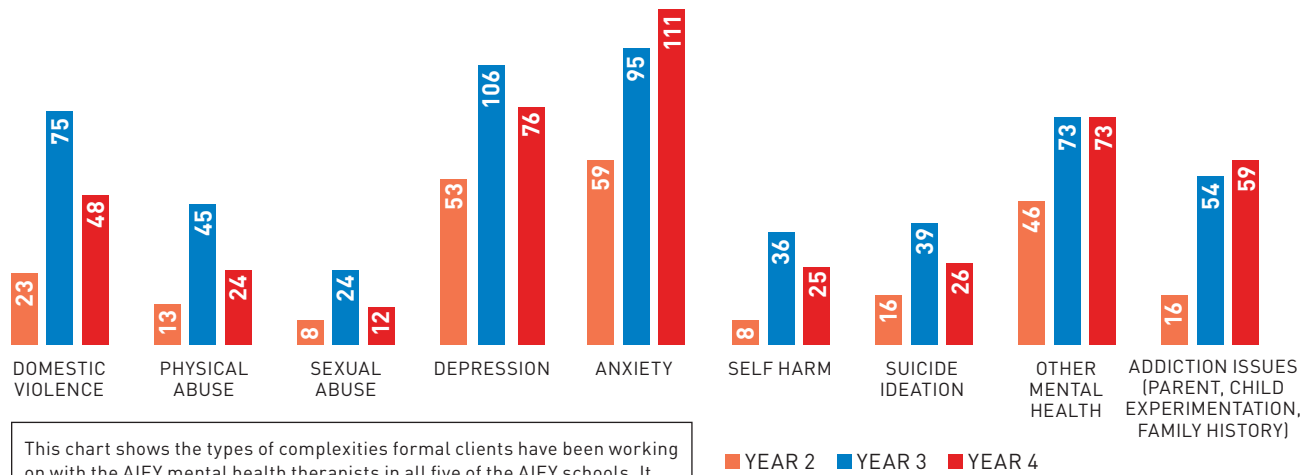
This chart shows the types of complexities formal clients have been working on with the AIFY mental health therapists in all five of the AIFY schools. It also shows the shifts in the types of complexities AIFY students and families have been experiencing from Year 2 to Year 4 of AIFY.

■ YEAR 2   ■ YEAR 3   ■ YEAR 4

We have also seen shifts in the specific types of complexities students and families are seeking support for over the years. **For Year 4, we see that more students and families are seeking support from the AIFY Mental Health therapists for their anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns (e.g., PTSD, ADHD, grief, parenting, trauma, family instability).** These increases could be for a number of reasons and is likley linked to things students and families were experiencing in their lives during Year 4 (e.g., being part of a global pandemic, coping with the impacts of the pandemic). What has also been significant over the years, is that when students and families are receiving support from the AIFY therapists, it's usually to address more than one complexity in their lives. **For Year 4, 66% of the students and families receiving formal support from an AIFY therapist were struggling with 2 or more complexities.** This is important because addressing and overcoming one complexity is difficult and trying to cope with and manage multiple complexities within families can leave students and families feeling overwhelmed and requiring more support (e.g., longer interventions). This further demonstrates the vulnerability experienced by students and families in the AIFY school communities. Over the years, there has been a growing awareness in the AIFY schools about the support available to students and/or families for mental health support and this could be why we see increased mental health complexities (e.g., more students/families seeking out support when they have mental health concerns). Also, the prevalence of these complexities among mental health therapy clients in the AIFY schools likely represents the mental health issues that can arise or be more prevalent among students and families that tend to experience more vulnerabilities, trauma, and other complexities than other communities in Edmonton.
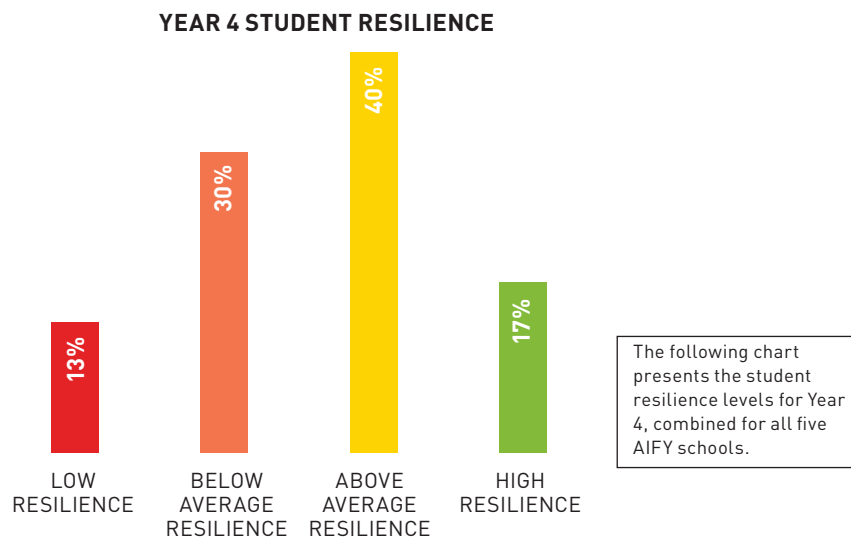
IN THE LIT:

In Canada, there were declines in youth mental health during the pandemic. When youth were surveyed, 15-17 years of age, over half said that their mental health was somewhat worse or much worse than what it was prior to the pandemic. One contributing factor was the difficulties youth had transitioning to online learning (e.g., feeling unmotivated to learn; Children First Canada, 2020).

Many families in Alberta also reported having a difficult time coping during the pandemic. For example, on a Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) survey, 70% of Albertans surveyed reported feeling stressed and 46% said they were experiencing increased loneliness. Also, 27% of people said they increased their use of cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis, or over the counter prescription drugs. During this time, when Albertans were struggling more with their mental health, 21% also reported having difficulty accessing mental health support services (HQCA, 2020).

Even though AIFY school communities are layered with complexity, students and families do have a number of strengths that can be used to help them work through these things and achieve success in their lives. We need to also understand the resilience of these school communities and the ways student resilience can be supported in the AIFY school communities.

Student Resilience

Student resiliency data gathered from Grade 4 to 12 students in the AIFY school communities begins to highlight some of the strengths in these school communities. Student resiliency surveys are administered in each AIFY school every Fall, to get a sense of how resilient students are at the start of a school year. Based on the Fall 2019 student survey (n = 1,244 students surveyed), **57% of Grade 4 to 12 students in the AIFY school reported 'High' or 'Above Average' levels of resilience. However, 43% of AIFY students reported 'Below Average' or 'Low' levels of resilience.**

YEAR 4 STUDENT RESILIENCE

- LOW RESILIENCE — 13%
- BELOW AVERAGE RESILIENCE — 30%
- ABOVE AVERAGE RESILIENCE — 40%
- HIGH RESILIENCE — 17%

The following chart presents the student resilience levels for Year 4, combined for all five AIFY schools.

Understanding how resilient students are at the start of the school year helps AIFY schools and agencies quickly identify groups of students who may need additional supports to build up their resilience, which can help them cope with and overcome challenges they are experiencing in their lives. The AIFY schools and initiative are committed to tracking and supporting the resilience of students through an annual student survey because they know the more resilient students are, the more likely they will be to achieve success in their lives and thrive, regardless of the complexities they are experiencing. While many students did report higher levels of resilience, we can also see that a significant proportion of students may need additional supports to help them build up their resilience, based on the proportion of students with below average or low levels of resilience. AIFY schools and support staff teams use the student resilience data to inform individualized support plans for students in each of the school communities. In particular, it is the students reporting low levels of resilience that are monitored by AIFY teams throughout the school year.

The Impact of COVID-19 on School Communities

Increased risks for families due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, these many layers of complexity have always been present in the AIFY schools and things only got more complex when the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools for the last 3 months of the 2019/2020 school year. For example, based on a family survey sent out to parents/caregivers in the AIFY school communities (June 2020), participating parents and

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IN THE LIT:

Comorbidity, the occurrence of 2 or more health challenges, is prevalent among Canadians (1.2% or 282,000 Canadians in 2012; Khan, 2017). Some of the challenges people experience with comorbid mental health disorders include: poorer physical health, increased dependence on mental health services, lowered likelihood to pursue higher education, and lower job satisfaction, which makes recovery more difficult (Cummings, Caporino, & Kendall, 2014; Khan, 2017). The onset of a second mental health disorder can occur within as little as six months, which means that immediate interventions and supports are key (Plana-Ripoll et al., 2019).

IN THE LIT:

When exposed to adversity, resilience is defined as:

• The capacity of individuals to navigate their ways to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that enhance their well-being;

• The capacity of individuals' physical and social contexts to provide those resources;

• The capacity of individuals, their families, and their communities to negotiate culturally meaningful ways to provide resources. (Definition from the Resilience Research Centre, M. Ungar, 2016)

IN THE LIT:

Fostering student's resilience can help them engage in less antisocial behavior, lowers their rate of academic failure, and decreases their chances of becoming depressed (Ungar et al. 2019; Luthar & Ansary, 2005; Zubric & Robson, 2003). Children's developmental outcomes under stress can also be improved with higher levels of resilience and supportive environments (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012).

caregivers were asked to report whether their children had experiences with *family violence, substance abuse, poverty,* and *mental Illness* in their families, **before** schools closed because of the pandemic (n = 39 parents/ caregivers responded to these survey questions). They reported the following:

- 16% of their children had experiences with Family Violence
- 11% of their children had experiences with Substance Abuse
- 20% of their children had experiences with Poverty
- 30% of their children had experiences with Mental Illness

We then asked parents/caregivers to report whether their children had experiences with Family Violence, Substance Abuse, Poverty, and Mental Illness in their families, **because of** the pandemic and school closures (n = 39 parents/ caregivers responded to these survey questions). They reported the following:

- 3% of children had experiences with Family Violence
- 8% of children had experiences with Substance Abuse
- 24% of children had experiences with Poverty
- 39% of children had experiences with Mental Illness

Before the pandemic, children in the AIFY school communities were already having early experiences with Family Violence, Substance Abuse, Poverty, and Mental Illness in their families. However, the pandemic and school closures ended up increasing these negative experiences for some children, especially when it comes to experiences with Poverty and Mental Illness.

Top concerns. AIFY School Administrators, Agency Staff, and ECSD School Staff also reported on the concerns they had for their students and families while schools were closed due to the pandemic. Overall, the biggest concerns these stakeholders had for their students and families were:

- Academic engagement
- Emotional and mental health
- Family stress due to financial and employment instability
- Food security
- Social Isolation
- Health and Safety
- The ability of families to access and use technology to engage

These concerns from AIFY stakeholders also map onto concerns identified by teachers who completed a survey for the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) at the start of the pandemic. These teachers also reported concerns about students' abilities to access technology, lack of support for learning at home, the stability and safety of students' homes, and students' disengaging in their learning (ATA, 2020).

"I worry about parents and kids feeling isolated during this time" (Agency Staff)

"Families are absolutely struggling with getting their children to do any schoolwork. I have been hearing this over and over from parents – "I can't get my kid to do anything!" Parents are very frustrated and overwhelmed with schoolwork at home" (ECSD School Staff)

"...a big model of our [school] program is a foundational literacy piece. Well, previous to COVID, we had really focused on their reading and the writing, but...we didn't quite realize it was a blind spot that we weren't really addressing the idea of technology literacy or tech literacy for our families... during COVID... we have parents [who] have a device or have limited access to a device, but don't have the tech literacy skills or necessarily the reading

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IN THE LIT:

The pandemic magnified inequities among communities and also increased the number of children who are vulnerable in Canada. For example, we are seeing more families struggle with food and shelter because of jobs lost during the pandemic. Also, affordable, quality child care was hard to access for families with lower incomes and the pandemic has only exacerbated this problem. Finally, racialized communities are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of infection rates and adverse effects of the pandemic (Children First Canada, 2020).

IN THE LIT:

Many families, about 1 in 7, were experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic. There was also a higher rate of food insecurity being reported among households with children. Households with children were especially concerned about food running out before there was enough money to buy more and struggling to purchase foods to create healthy and balanced meals (Children First Canada, 2020).

IN THE LIT:

Inequities emerged in terms of access to resources for online learning during the pandemic. According to a study based on the Canadian Internet Use Survey in 2018, low-income households were less likely to have internet access compared to high-income households. In line with these findings, more online learning occurred on mobile devices among low-income households during the pandemic, compared to the use of personal computers among higher-income households (Children First Canada, 2020).

skills to read through those pieces. And that is something that is incredibly impactful when we think about how the whole planet has shifted to ... this online world... And that's been very difficult for our families because previously they would come to us and we would walk them through and support them with that. And now we're trying to do that in very different ways." (School Administrator)

Changes in needs. School Administrators from four of the AIFY schools also shared how they have seen characteristics of their school communities and the neighbourhoods surrounding their schools change as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has only enhanced many of the challenges students and families were already experiencing. For example, School Administrators are seeing more economic instability, poverty, unemployment, and fear among students and families in their school communities.

"Students are coming in hungry and they're coming in without, and it's almost become a bit of a common narrative, which is disheartening."
(School Administrator)

"... through COVID, we saw increases of domestic violence and addiction and our families go through exceptionally hard times..." (School Administrator)

Also, neighbourhoods surrounding some of the AIFY school communities are becoming less safe.

"We're seeing a huge transiency rate in our community, but also a huge increase in crime and violent crime. So, when we think about the city and the shifts that Alberta [has] gone through, but specifically Edmonton...that economic disparity and that gap has widened...And that when we think about the impact of poverty and economic thresholds, where we had families really close to that piece, now they're just moved even farther behind. And unfortunately, we're seeing a huge astronomical increase in violent crimes in our community."
(School Administrator)

AIFY School Cultures

In Year 4, we continued to hear about the ways AIFY school cultures have shifted over the years and how they continue to evolve to support the needs of students and families in these school communities. To demonstrate the important school culture characteristics of the AIFY schools, we will share family and student perspectives on the AIFY school cultures, highlight the importance of trauma-informed practice in these schools, and describe how collaborative practices used to support students and families has contributed to positive shifts in the AIFY school cultures.

Family and Student Perspectives. In Year 4, Parents and Caregivers from the AIFY school communities reported high levels of agreement when asked about the following school characteristics on a family survey:

• Feeling welcome whenever they visit the school (87% agreement; n = 34)

• Feeling the school is a safe place for their children (87% agreement; n = 34)

• Schools do a good job communicating with families (82% agreement; n = 32)

"there's a really great open communication and...the admin...they're there every morning, all the principals, like shaking hands, and really intentionally knowing the families." (Parent)

"you feel like you can leave your kids in a safe environment and you feel that kind of support" (Parent)

"we've gotten so comfortable with everyone there too and I think you know in a way- It's almost like a family community, right" (Parent)

"...this is the best school I can imagine being in. And so much of it is because we're celebrating...a community of practice with all the helpers. And...it feels [like] a good family vibe ..." (Parent)

In addition, parents and caregivers also believed the people who work in the AIFY schools have several important qualities and these people have had a positive impact on their families. They reported that people who work in the school:

- Are respectful (87% agreement; n = 33)
- Are sensitive to families' needs (84% agreement; n = 32)
- Care about the wellbeing of the children and families in the school (92% agreement; n = 33)
- Have contributed to the wellbeing of the families (84% agreement; n= 32)

"I think that it's nice to be able to just... pick up a phone and call your school and be able to talk to them and there's no judgement" (Parent)

"They're very supportive. They're very helping, they're kind" (Parent)

The AIFY schools are also seen as a place where students and families can have their needs met, including basic needs and other non-educational needs. On the family survey, we asked parents and caregivers if, before schools closed because of the pandemic, their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter were met with the help of the supports available at the school. Parents and Caregivers reported the following:

- 74% said their family's basic needs for food were being met (n = 29)
- 44% said their family's basic needs for clothing were being met (n = 17)
- 66% said their family's basic needs for shelter were being met (n = 25)

We also asked families to report on whether supports in the schools were still able to support these basic needs while schools were closed because of the pandemic. When schools were closed because of the pandemic, parents and caregivers reported the following:

- 82% said their family's basic needs for food were being met (n = 32)
- 69% said their family's basic needs for clothing were being met (n = 27)
- 84% said their family's basic needs for shelter were being met (n = 32)

So, prior to the pandemic, parents and caregivers believed supports available at the school were helping address their families' basic need. However, after the pandemic closed schools, even more parents and caregivers surveyed believed the school supports available were helping to meet their families' basic needs.

From the student resiliency survey, completed by Grade 4 to 12 students in the AIFY schools, students were also asked whether there were caring, positive role models in their schools and if there were adults they could go to for help with a problem. For Year 4, **78% (n = 907 students) of these AIFY students reported there were positive caring role models in their schools and 90% (n = 1,045 students) reported they had an adult in the school they could go to for help with a problem.**

Trauma-Informed Schools. AIFY, in alignment with the values and professional development efforts of the partnering school Divisions, has also been focused on supporting schools in their efforts to become trauma-informed. Over the years, we have heard how school stakeholders (e.g., School Administrators, Teachers) and Agency Stakeholders (e.g., Agency Staff, Agency Leaders) have adopted a trauma-

IN THE **LIT:**

Teachers perceive school supports such as mental health supports as being essential to meet the needs of students because teachers and staff are not adequately trained to address students' needs such as dealing with trauma and mental health (Moon, Williford, & Mendenhall, 2017).

IN THE **LIT:**

When schools have trauma-informed approaches to support the wellbeing of students and their families, this can help build or re-establish trusting relationships between schools and families who have experience with adversity. Also, schools that have a trauma-informed lens, are better equipped to provide support to students that will help them reach their potential (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

informed lens when working with students and families in their schools. In Year 3, a high proportion of AIFY teachers surveyed said they knew what trauma-informed practice was (81%, n = 57) and that they felt it was important to use trauma-informed practices when working with students and families who are experiencing a lot of complexities (86%; n = 60). In Year 4, AIFY teachers from the Edmonton Catholic Division continued to demonstrate this knowledge trauma-informed practice and perceived importance of these practices. For Year 4, 95% of ECSD teachers (n = 18) reported knowing what trauma-informed practice is and 95% (n = 18) thought it was important to use trauma-informed practices with complex students and families in the AIFY schools.

> *"Meeting the physical and emotional needs of our students by far takes precedence over getting curriculum covered with many of them! Basic needs and safety must be met before learning can occur."* (ECSD School Staff)

Collaborating to Support Students and Families. AIFY school cultures have also shifted over the years to become collaborative environments where many different types of people (e.g., School staff, Division support staff, AIFY agency staff, Agency leaders) work together to support the wellbeing of students and families that are part of these school communities. For example, School Administrators are working closely with Agency leaders to integrate and coordinate the AIFY supports in each school, Agency staff are working closely with School Staff and with each other to develop support plans for students and their families. Collaborative service delivery in these schools is crucial and has contributed to the effectiveness of AIFY integration and service delivery.

In a survey, we asked School Staff and the Agency staff who work in the five AIFY schools to report on the collaborative elements of the AIFY work. Almost all of the AIFY agency staff (90%, n = 18) and ECSD school staff (95%, n = 18) surveyed felt they could rely on their colleagues to help them support students and their families when needed. They also reported it felt easy to talk to each other when they needed help with something (90%, n = 17, 18) and 85% of agency staff (n = 17) and 84% of ECSD school staff (n = 16) reported communication was good. Overall, most of the agency staff (80%; n = 16) and school staff stakeholders (90%; n = 17) surveyed felt the schools and agencies involved in the AIFY work were collaborating successfully in Year 4.

It is also important to note that the pandemic and school closures that took place in the 2019/2020 school year did not disrupt the collaborative efforts of AIFY stakeholders. The collaborative practices and service delivery may have looked different, but it was still ongoing. For example, in a survey, we asked agency staff if, **before school closures,** they could easily connect with school staff to talk about the students/families they are working with. 85% (n = 17) said they could connect easily with school staff to do this **before school closures.** We then asked if they could still easily connect with school staff **after school closures,** 80% (n = 16) said they could still easily connect with school staff to talk about the students and families they work with **after school closures.** 84% of Edmonton Catholic school staff (n = 16) also reported that they can still easily connect with or work with the AIFY staff to get supports for the students and families in their school communities. In the *Working Through Adversity* section of this report, you can find more information about how the AIFY initiative adapted and pivoted to continue supporting and meeting the needs of students and families in the AIFY schools during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

> *"So, we had a pandemic that tested all the systems we put in place. And what we learned is that our systems made sense. They were appropriate. They've been able to be responsive in light of this new context. So, the vision of that hub partnership, coexisting, I think really came to light for us. And really that synergy between partners and staff is now just this fluid expectation. It's a culture piece. So, it's not even like you're here and we're here... no... this is a school culture..."* (School Administrator)

"So, when I say our staff, I'm always talking about our partners because they're part of the team... it was teachers and partners working together to engage [students]...." (School Administrators)

Over the last four years, we have seen AIFY and its staff become integral pieces of each school community. In interviews with AIFY School Administrators, they continue to talk about the ways AIFY has become "woven into the fabric" of the school communities.

"They're really deeply woven into the fabric of this school community. So, there would be so many losses that I really can't even begin to imagine if they weren't in this school. Students would feel it. Parents would feel it, our greater community at large would feel it because they really support students in making good choices and helping them to... connect...I can't really think of anyone who wouldn't feel the impact." (School Administrator)

School Administrators talk about AIFY as "part of" schools in a way that demonstrates AIFY is no longer considered a separate entity that works in the school communities. AIFY has become important pieces of these school communities and these schools would not be complete without AIFY.

"Our All in For Youth teams, since the beginning have been very involved in being a part of our school community and reaching out and interacting with families. And it just became...a part of how we do things here." (School Administrator)
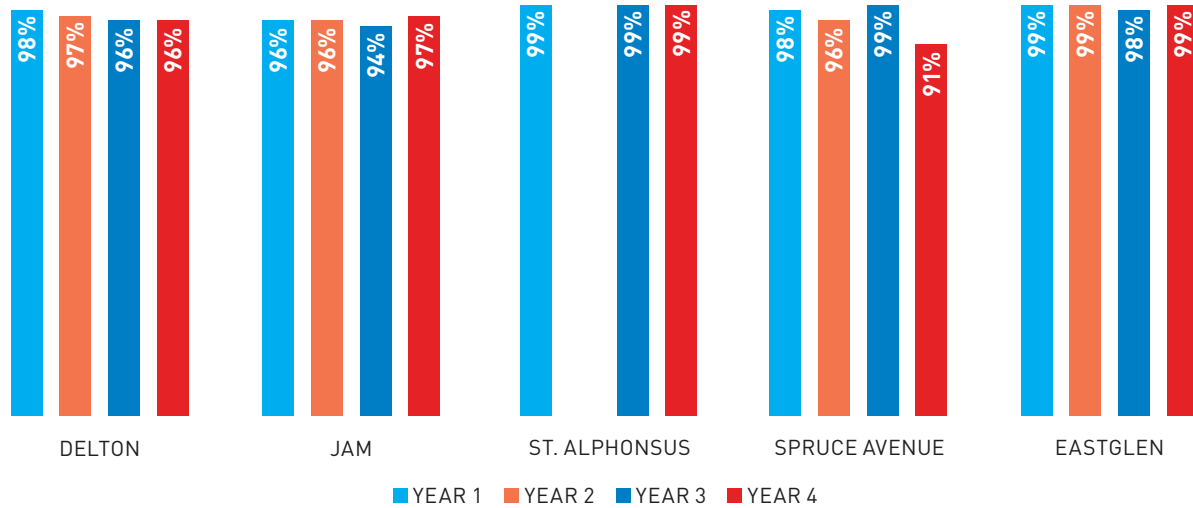
"[I] very much see our team as part of our staff. And I think if we didn't have it...we would feel it and it would just be such a loss for our kids and our families and our teachers, because ...they're part of...our web, they're part of... what we do here." (School Administrator)

Strengths of Students and Families

In addition to the characteristics of the school communities already presented, the students and families that are part of the AIFY school communities also have a number of strengths that need to be highlighted. These strengths are the ways students value education, how students and families seek out support when needed, and the goals students have for themselves and the aspirations parents and caregivers have for their children.

Students Value Education. One significant strength we have seen persist across the years for the AIFY students who complete the resiliency survey (Grade 4 – 12 students), is students' intention to complete high school. For the last four years, AIFY students who complete this survey have been asked if they plan to complete high school. Consistently, across all five AIFY schools, we have seen every year that almost all the students answering this question say they plan to complete high school. For Year 4 in particular, across the five AIFY schools, 96% (n = 1141) of the AIFY students said 'yes' they plan to complete high school.

## STUDENT INTENTION TO COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL: 4 YEAR TREND

	DELTON	JAM	ST. ALPHONSUS	SPRUCE AVENUE	EASTGLEN
YEAR 1	98%	96%	99%	98%	99%
YEAR 2	97%	96%		96%	99%
YEAR 3	96%	94%	99%	99%	98%
YEAR 4	96%	97%	99%	91%	99%

■ YEAR 1 ■ YEAR 2 ■ YEAR 3 ■ YEAR 4

Note: No data available for St. Alphonsus for Year 2.

This finding is important because it demonstrates that students in these schools, even when experiencing numerous complexities in their lives, intend to complete high school and they see this as something they can achieve in the future.

Another strength of the AIFY students is their perceived academic engagement. On the same resiliency survey, students are also asked questions about their engagement related to different aspects of their schooling (e.g., student connectedness, connections to teachers). A set of these questions ask students about how they value their academics and their perceptions of academic success (e.g., "I believe I can do well in school"). Based on this measure of Academic Engagement in Year 4, the AIFY students surveyed across the five schools (n = 1200), demonstrated high levels of academic engagement. Almost 80% of the students surveyed had 'Above Average' or 'High Levels' of perceived Academic Engagement.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (OVERALL): ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

LOW ENGAGEMENT (Y4)	BELOW AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT (Y4)	ABOVE AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT (Y4)	HIGH ENGAGEMENT (Y4)
4%	17%	27%	52%
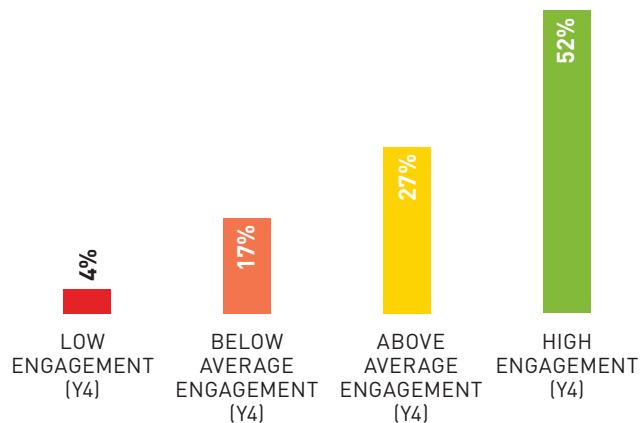
Again, this strength should be highlighted because these levels of academic engagement might not be expected from school communities with these types of complexities and that experience higher levels of vulnerability (compared to other schools). These findings demonstrate that even amid the challenge and complexity vulnerable students have important strengths that can be used to help them thrive and achieve success, regardless of the circumstances they may be experiencing in their lives.

Students and Families Seek out Support. By Year 4 of AIFY, many of the students and families in the AIFY school communities see their schools as a source of support and demonstrate knowledge and awareness about how to seek out support when they need it.

In the AIFY schools, students and families have experienced some significant shifts in their self-advocacy. In the early years of AIFY, it was predominantly schools and agency staff reaching out to families to get them connected to supports. Now, students and families often advocate for themselves and seek out supports from their school community. In a family survey, we asked parents/caregivers whether they knew who to go to for help in their school and if they knew how to access resources and supports from the school. For Year 4, **before schools were closed because of the pandemic, 78% of parent/caregiver respondents (n = 29) said they knew which people to go to for support in the school when they needed help. 70% (n = 26) also said they knew how to access resources and supports from the school.** This type of knowledge and these self-advocacy behaviours demonstrate that students and families have come to trust and rely on their school communities as sources of support. Even when the pandemic closed schools down for the rest of the 2019/2020 school year, students and families were still able to stay connected to schools and the supports they needed. Parents and caregivers said it was through phone calls, virtual meetings, texts, emails, and socially distanced visits that these connections were maintained.

These self-advocacy behaviors are an important strength because students and families are choosing to take actions to solve problems they are encountering in their lives. For many reasons, people often struggle to ask for help (e.g., feelings of shame, don't know who to ask, don't trust people to help them), but the AIFY students and families have been able to demonstrate an increase in these behaviours over time. This can help students and families identify and address problems sooner in their lives and have opportunities to access supports earlier, before things get worse.

Students and families have hopes and dreams. A final strength of the AIFY school communities is the aspirations families have for their children and the goals students have for themselves. Having aspirations and goals is significant because it can demonstrate that families and students have hope for the future and want to work towards something. When asked about the hopes and dreams they have for their children, parents and caregivers said they hope their children:

- Achieve success in their schooling (e.g., complete high school, go to university)

  "My main thing is that they get an education... for right now, finish your grade 12." (Parent)

- Hold onto their values

  "Stand up for what she believes in 'cause that's how I was taught" (Parent)

- Have good experiences in life

  "Like any parent, I just want them to be happy and successful...in all they're doing." (Parent)

- Can be confident and resilient in the future

  "...keep trying and keep trying until you get it and – as much as it takes..." (Parent)

In interviews, some AIFY students also shared the goals they have for themselves:

- Improve their academics

  "My goal is to be a better student" (Student)

- Have more social connections

  "...meet new people" (Student)

- Volunteer to support programs

  "Well the thing I want to do the most is I want to stick to the people who help[ed] me ... I don't think I'll be leaving the club anytime soon. I might come back to help with the ... other students [while I'm] in university...And I might help them in the future." (Students)

Overall, the AIFY school communities are made up of students and families who are facing complexity and adversity in their lives, but who also have a number of strengths (some that were always present, some that developed over the years of AIFY). AIFY recognizes these strengths and is committed to helping students and families use and build up their strengths.

"AIFY staff members are such caring, strength-based and highly effective people. I honestly don't know what our families would do without the wraparound services that they provide" (ECSD School Staff)

WORKING
through
ADVERSITY:
THE STRENGTHS OF
THE AIFY INITIATIVE

WORKING *through* ADVERSITY:

THE STRENGTHS OF THE AIFY INITIATIVE

COVID is having an impact across the globe, in all facets of our lives. However, in Alberta, the pandemic and its negative impacts are not the only thing affecting the wellbeing of children and families who live in this province. At the same time that Alberta and its communities are trying to manage and live through the COVID pandemic, the province is experiencing an economic downturn that has resulted in funding cuts to core systems (e.g., Education, Health). Unfortunately, neither COVID nor the economy is expected to improve substantially in the near future and unlike other Canadian provinces, Alberta will be trying to recover from more than just the direct impacts of COVID. The current Alberta government is expecting to face economic challenges for the next few years, at least (GOA, 2020). Due to increased spending in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and decreased revenue, the government is projecting it will not be able to balance the budget anytime in the near future, which can only happen if the GDP can increase to what it was before the pandemic hit. With many uncertainties still on the horizon, it could be many years before Alberta fully recovers.

With various AIFY stakeholder interviews, we heard first-hand how COVID, the economic downturn, and the interaction of the two are impacting the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable students and families in Edmonton (interviews with School Administrators, Steering partners, and Operations partners). We also heard how AIFY responded during these challenging times. In this section of the report, we want to share the strengths of the AIFY initiative and partnership that contributed to a quick and effective response during these challenging times. This includes how the AIFY initiative and its partners responded to the onset of the COVID pandemic and how they continue working to provide critical supports to students and families amid the pandemic and the depressed economy in Alberta.

Harsh Realities for Alberta

For Families:

We know Canadian students and families struggled during the school closures that occurred in the 2019/2020 school year because of COVID. (School closures were provincially mandated and meant the school building was physically closed to students and families, but educators and service providers were still working with families remotely or by following Alberta Health protocols during this time). AIFY stakeholders saw families immediately needing food and financial support when the pandemic first hit. Also, many families in the AIFY school communities were not equipped to easily transition to online learning for their children (e.g., did not have access to hardware needed, lack of technology literacy). More demands were also placed on families during this time. Parents/caregivers had to still provide for their children (e.g., financially, emotionally, etc.) while also becoming more active participants in their children's schooling (e.g., helping children navigate their online schooling, helping children engage in their online schooling).

Unfortunately, for many AIFY families, the pandemic is only amplifying existing complexities families were already coping with. Funding cuts to core systems in Alberta, like Education and Health, also mean there are less resources available to support these families over time.

IN THE **LIT:**

The full effects of Covid-19 on childhood poverty have yet to been fully seen or experienced. One thing that is clear though is that Covid-19 has the potential to increase the amount of vulnerability low-income families may face. For instance, the pandemic has resulted in increased food insecurity and families in Alberta are facing in unprecedent financial challenges. For instance, over 1 million Albertans applied for CERB and the unemployment rate is at an all-time high of 15.5%. Also, due to school and support closures, children no longer had an outlet to avoid family violence and less children were able to access supports they normally would. Unfortunately, the pandemic is contributing to increasing levels of vulnerability in families (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2020).

Increases in mental health issues are also expected. This can include more mental, behavioral, and anxiety related disorders and increased antidepressant use. The high rates of unemployment due to the Covid-19 pandemic will also likely lead to increased mental health concerns in vulnerable populations. Furthermore, high-risk populations and women are more likely to face the burden of these human impacts (Deloitte, 2020).

People living in poverty, children, and women are also all more likely to be affected by the social impacts of Covid-19. For instance, individuals living in low income are less likely to work remotely and have health benefits. This results in low-income families having a higher chance of contracting the virus, being more food insecure, and more limited access mental health supports (The City of Spruce Grove, 2020).

"And then other budgetary [challenges… we have families who come and ask for bus passes. Transportation to and from school has…been quite an obstacle this year because, with [the] previous government, bus passes were subsidized and [now] there's no longer a subsidy. So that's a $60 a month cost per bus pass to families. That's a hit. Like if you have two or three or four children in school. That's a monthly cost that's insurmountable."
(School Administrator)

"…the budget cuts for me [means] it's less humans, less resources, less availability of those essential supports. We're really feeling it in areas like Alberta Health services. Those cuts have huge impact around access to mental health supports, speech language. So now, we're not getting the same support around speech language, huge implications… when we think about the way the budget has impacted kindergarten and how we would create such solid foundations for our kids." (School Administrator)

For Schools:

Due to the pandemic and the economic downturn in Alberta, the AIFY schools are also trying to cope with the ever-changing landscape when it comes to how they can support students and their families in schools and what resources they can access to do this. For example, schools had to quickly shift to remote teaching methods for their students when schools closed in March 2020. Schools also worked hard to make sure they could still connect with and support families who were experiencing more vulnerability during these times (e.g., struggling with technology, with food security, with mental health, etc.). Schools, in collaboration with their AIFY teams, continue to adapt to support students and families in the best and safest ways possible, but this takes a lot of effort and the constant flux can be very challenging.

"There are lots of moving parts… I know we're doing an amazing job even though each day brings challenges. Students are absent, or we hear about a family's heartbreaking circumstances and we need to respond and connect with families in different ways. Each morning we determine 'What do we know about this day? How do we get ready for success? What do we need to do to provide support while making sure … the kids are safe, the teachers are supported, so learning can occur?'. A teacher could be away due to isolation duties, so we need to ensure we have a supply teacher for an extended period of time. Everyday is complex." (School Administrator)

"And I guess for teachers, I'll tell you very honestly, I think they're feeling very time constrained and also torn between, you know, wanting to be here with our students, but maintaining protocols and, securing a supply teacher when you're not going to be here. There are certain things like just trying to make sure that they can maintain connection with students throughout … the trying times of COVID. So, if you have a class that has to go to an isolate. You still have to connect with them, but it's…being almost ready at all times to pivot. It's a lot." (School Administrator)

Some of the AIFY School Administrators also expressed how the pandemic and the way it has shifted how schools have to operate, has led to them feeling more pressure as school leaders. In addition to feeling responsible for the wellbeing of every person in the school (e.g., socially, emotionally, physically, etc.), school administrators can also feel more pressure now to ensure schools remain safe places for students and staff during the pandemic.

"… there's a focus on wellness and the time to commit to that, because there are still a lot of things that need to happen in the building, you know, we're still doing work with students on the daily, but how to creatively problem

solve and how to collaborate and how to still provide opportunities for connection and collaboration that don't have a negative impact on health. We're asking a lot of staff, even though, you know, I feel like sometimes I'm sending out really mixed messages, like, okay guys, take care of yourself. You're really important to us, but here's your massive list of things to do. So deep breath and then get at it. Right... I do feel a little Jekyll and Hyde because there's still so many things to do and the responsibilities of an educator and staff that work with students. And we feel a huge... moral imperative to do our best, to support learning because we know it has impacts on students when they do have learning gaps." (School Administrator)

Schools and the people who work in them are doing all they can to continue supporting students and families, but this work has become even harder to do in the current context. COVID and the public health restrictions in place to keep schools as safe as possible have created additional barriers for schools when it comes to connecting with families and building a sense of community. For example, when students were able to return to school in September 2020, families were no longer able to enter or gather in the school building (e.g., to pick up children at the end of the school day, to drop in to speak with school staff).

"...we can't have parents coming into the building. We were so used to having parents be welcomed into our school, to gather out in our front foyer, but now that sense of community and connection has had to occur in different ways." (School Administrator)

This is a hard adjustment for AIFY schools, considering they have spent the last 4 years working hard to make their schools a second home for students and their families. AIFY schools have become community hubs where families and community members are always welcome. These changes will likely not be permanent, but for the time that families are not allowed in schools, there will be negative repercussions (e.g., families losing connection to the school community, families and students becoming more isolated).

School Divisions are also having to deal with budget cuts that will be implemented to support long-term funding strategies for the Ministry of Education. These impending budget cuts will result in a loss of positions. Teachers, educational assistants, psychologists, social workers, a range of positions across AIFY schools (and the majority of schools in all Divisions) will end up being lost and fewer staff will be in those buildings today and in the future to support students and their families.

This is concerning considering the needs of the AIFY school communities are not reduced. In fact, the need is arguably greater in these schools than it has ever been before. It is also important to recognize that the needs of some students and families are also becoming more complex. For example, when AIFY schools were re-opened, around 1/3 of their students participated in online learning and this meant schools had to divert existing resources and capacity to support these students, which can take away from resources and capacity that would have been available to support in-person learning. Again, this is likely a temporary diversion of resources, but while this is happening, gaps in support are being created as schools try to figure out how to support and stay connected to students and their families in two different places, in-person and online. Ultimately, COVID, budget cuts, and the interplay of both are resulting in less support for AIFY students and their families, who were already experiencing a lot of vulnerability in their lives. When resources are constrained like this, it can mean the needs of students and families have to be triaged, which is not necessarily the ideal support strategy. School Administrators are thankful though for the AIFY supports and the agency staff who, in collaboration with school staff, help them re-examine how to best support students and their families during these difficult times. In particular, one school administrator shared how it is supports like AIFY that will help schools "equalize opportunities for students and families" by

providing foundational supports, creating compassionate connections, and removing barriers to learning. This is especially critical when it comes to supporting students and families from unique backgrounds, who have experienced many different things in their lives. With supports like AIFY helping schools through these hard times, education can be an equalizer and bring students and their families success, now and in the future.

For Social Service Agencies:

Like schools, social service agencies are also facing huge challenges when it comes to their ability to continue serving and meeting the diverse and complex needs of children, youth, and families in our communities. For example, the provincial government is signaling that more responsibility will be placed on 'civil society' to support communities with their diverse needs (Community and Social Services of Alberta, 2020). Unfortunately, this will add pressure onto an already taxed sectors who, before COVID and the economic downturn, were struggling to access the resources needed to serve and meet the needs of their communities.

> *"I do think it put a lot of strain on the groups themselves though... especially because some of them then lost funding, especially with...the provincial budget cut that came right before, some of them had already lost staff or the ability to run a program. And so not only were they then potentially operating at...a lower capacity, but then [they] had to do all this other increased work. And so, I think it was really difficult for them."* (Steering Partner)

Organizations that are trying to serve communities were already experiencing funding cuts from some government bodies (e.g., Children's Services) and now the pandemic is also contributing to funding cuts because of decreases in charitable giving and an inability to fundraise in typically effective ways (e.g., in-person fundraising events). These declines in charitable giving are putting enormous financial stress on non-profits and charities that are working on the front lines (Charity Intelligence Canada, 2020). Unfortunately, charitable giving has been on the decline for decades in Canada, while demand for services from charities is only increasing (Imagine Canada, 2019). Now, with the pandemic, it would not be surprising to see this decline in giving continue for years to come. Again, like schools, social service agencies are getting hit from multiple sides and this is preventing them from providing essential supports to children, youth, and families in our communities. During the pandemic, the federal government recognized the role of community and charitable organizations as essential service providers (Brodhead, 2020). As essential service providers, it will be important focus efforts on the recovery of the not for profit/charitable sector. The current Alberta government acknowledges that a recovery plan is needed for the not for profit/charitable sector, but it will take time (Community and Social Services of Alberta, 2020).

AIFY schools and partners are still committed to their vision and mission of supporting the wellbeing and students and families in their school communities. This work was already difficult with decreasing resources available to schools and community partners. However, AIFY and all its partners will continue to collaborate, be nimble, and are ready to pivot as needed to ensure students and families in the AIFY school communities can access the essential wraparound supports they need to thrive now and into the future.

The AIFY Response

In the AIFY school communities, school and agency partners worked together on the ground during school closures to continue supporting the many needs of students and their families with critical wraparound supports. A lot of work was done to identify students and families at risk, identify their immediate needs, and coordinate efforts to respond quickly and address these needs. The AIFY supports and services did have to

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IN THE LIT:

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic downturn, non-for-profit and charitable organizations are having trouble with capacity issues and serving clients and communities. Service providers are having to work in more complex environments when at the same time there is an increase in demand for their supports/services, but they have decreased capacity. Although these organizations are doing their best jobs to support families and the community, organizations are not always able to meet the demand and, in some instances, organizations had to change or remove offerings due to a lack of capacity/resources (ABNN, 2020)

adapt and make changes to their modes of service delivery and the AIFY schools could no longer be the main hubs where connections were made with students and families. However, while there were shifts in the AIFY model of support around how services were delivered, AIFY School and Agency partners were still focused on supporting the wellbeing of students and families in the AIFY school communities, regardless of the additional challenges and barriers brought on by COVID and limited resources.

"I think it (the response to COVID) was really positive. And I think it was quite prompt. Obviously if there'd been more resources, everybody could have done more, but I think people did quite a lot with the resources that they had available, and made reasonable adjustments and as far as I could see... it went quite well." (Steering Partner)

"In short, it was amazing. It was amazing to see our partners very quickly mobilize and do what was within their scope and their area of expertise to be able to really think about what families needed" (Operations Partner)

"...I think it's the shared commitment to the children and the youth and families. And I think that came through loud and clear during COVID. Everyone just remained focused on the wellbeing of families during this extraordinary time." (Operations Partner)

What came up a lot in interviews with Operations and Steering partners was how quickly and frequently AIFY was able to pivot during these times to ensure AIFY supports and services could still be accessible to students and families. The AIFY model and collaborative partnership was tested and both demonstrated their unique ability to be flexible and adapt as needed.

"...I've always been impressed by our partners, but to see them pivot on a dime in this circumstance in such an unknown state that we were moving in into. They just did what had to be done and continue[d] to evolve and change as new information became available." (Steering Partner)

Below are some of the specific ways AIFY partners pivoted during the school closures to continue supporting students and families:

☎	BGCBigs reached out to over 300 families in one week to determine AIFY families' immediate needs; They continued to conduct family wellness calls throughout the school closures to keep track of families' changing needs during this time
📱	Edmonton Community Foundation, the United Way and the Muttart Foundation donated 496 computers to meet students' and families' hardware needs to support remote access to supports/programs and online learning.
💬	The Family Centre focused on addressing families' immediate needs, like food and technology access. These agency staff helped to distribute 382 supplementary food packages and 476 computers to families and used these visits as an opportunity to check in with families about their mental health. Agency staff were able to socially connect with these families and conversations with families quickly shifted from food or technology needs to their mental health, relationships, and their coping.
🛒	e4c, in collaboration with the Edmonton Public and Catholic school partners, adapted their nutrition support programming so AIFY families experiencing food insecurity could still receive nutrition support outside of the school.

	AIFY parnters provided internet for students and families without access.
	With funding support from Edmonton Community Foundation, BGCBigs and REACH developed family activity kits that were delivered to families periodically over the course of the school closures
	AIFY Agency Staff also shifted their practice as needed to ensure connections with students and families were maintained.

- Success Coaches played a large role in reaching out to students and/or families that schools were concerned about when it came to their engagement with online schooling (e.g., not seeing them consistently online for schooling); Success coaches also made more connections with parents and caregivers of students, which helped them work together with parents/caregivers to support students during this time

- Mental Health Therapists became certified in Telehealth and quickly reached out to all their clients when schools first closed to make sure families knew they could still access mental health supports; Therapists found themselves providing support over the phone to many students and families, as this was the mode of service delivery many felt comfortable with

- Out of School Time Coordinators worked to develop online programming options for students to access during school closures and these staff also continued to support schools, AIFY teams, and their agencies in any additional efforts needed to continue supporting students and families

- In-person mentoring was shifted to virtual mentoring when possible and some Agency staff also became virtual mentors for AIFY students; The focus of the work done between mentors and mentees also shifted as needed, with a focus on academics and wellbeing (e.g., helping students remain engaged with online schooling)

- Roots and Wings family support workers continued to work in the community throughout school closures, to physically check on families and "have eyes on them", especially with families where there were concerns about domestic violence or child abuse; these agency staff also created online parent groups so parents and caregivers in the AIFY schools also had opportunities to connect with other parents/caregivers during this time.

- AIFY supervisors connected with agency staff much more to support these staff as they figured out how they could continue to support their students and families in safe and effective ways.

"... because of this collaborative, we were able to come together quickly to meet the needs of our most vulnerable families." (Steering Partner)

"They are continuing to look at the protocols that are required from our province about safety. And they're continuing to look at how they can work within those protocols to safely deliver programming. And so I think that what our partners have really demonstrated is that, they continue to think about what's best for our kids and families within this new environment and having to work differently" (Operations Partner)

We also heard from stakeholders about specific strengths of the AIFY partnership that contributed to its ability to respond the way it did. These strengths are also helping them continue to adapt and change, as needed, to ensure students and families are still supported in the AIFY schools as we continue to live amid a pandemic and suffering economy. The strength that was identified most by Steering and Operations partners was the established and trusting relationships AIFY partners have with one another. It is these relationships that have facilitated the AIFY work for the last 4 years, but also allowed AIFY to respond the way it did when schools closed down in March 2020.

> *"And I think we also have a lot of faith and trust in each other, in terms of what needs to be done and just taking the leadership on it and then sharing and informing people as needed as you go along...Those existing relationships just had such an impact in being able to move quickly and just to have confidence in each other's choices."* (Operations Partner)

> *"So, we had those partnerships in place, and we could identify where the problems were, and we could get on with it...I could list you a number of things that were able to just happen quickly... because of that collaboration. And barriers were burst down and including you know often very ridged bureaucratic systems with the city. So those were broken down too. And you just saw how important the relationship was when a crisis hit."*
> (Steering Committee)

It was with these strong, trusting relationships that AIFY was easily able to continue their collaborative work to support students and families in the AIFY school, even in crisis. The partners also stayed flexible and relied on their different expertise to solve problems and adapt as needed.

> *"The different areas of expertise that it all come together. Those ... all continue to be really important and really helping to make our work successful."*
> (Operations Partner)

> *"... just thinking about it philosophically, I think it's all in the title, you know, All in For Youth, we're all in. So, whatever it takes kind of thing. And I think that's the whole feeling of the work and of the initiative. I'd say we are creative problem solv[ers], solution focused ..."* (Operations Partner)

The AIFY partners were also willing and actively leveraging other relationships or networks as needed to maintain the AIFY supports for students and families.

> *"I think the one that really stands out for me this year is to how partners are willing to use their position, use their networks, to be able to further the work of All in For Youth. So, whether that's bringing in additional funding, whether that's connecting someone new to work who might have influence, we may have leadership of different pieces of work by different groups by different partners, but it doesn't preclude anyone from being able to step up and say, I'd like to introduce you to so, and so they might be able to provide some funding or open a door or something like this. And I think that's been a huge asset given how many years we've had different kinds of struggles, especially financial, to see partners who are willing to use their own networks, and, in some cases, put some of their own immediate needs aside"* (Operations Partner)

This exemplifies the commitment the AIFY partners have to the initiative and to the students and families they serve. This commitment was always present, but it came through even stronger in Year 4 as AIFY partner rallied together (and with others as needed) to continue supporting students and families. As the following quote describes, AIFY built a foundation in the beginning of this initiative and without that, the COVID response may not have been nearly as effective.

"... we have a foundation...we would not have been as successful in our responsiveness and our ability to be nimble if there wasn't this foundation that we're all sitting on. And for some of us, I think we've been at the table for a long, long time. There's a component of relationship. There's a clarity around mandate. Every agency knows what their role is in that partnership. There's a compelling importance of the families that we serve. So, there's something there that exists due to the history, the legacy, the long-time of working together that just enabled us to move. And... within that foundation, there's just the trust that we all know what we're doing and we're all moving ahead in a shared direction." (Operations Partner)

Finally, parents and caregivers also shared that the AIFY schools and the people that work in them continued to connect with families during school closures. Schools and agency staff were offering support as needed and parents/caregivers also mentioned the different ways people were connecting with them to offer support.

"Offering emotional support" (Parent)

"They have kept up our parent coffee group through zoom chats" (Parent)

"Calling me if I need any support like learning materials and food supplies." (Parent)

Families still felt supported by their school communities during these times and were appreciative of all the support.

"I am so thankful for the All in For Youth program and how it has helped our family with all their help and support. The teachers and school staff are the best I have experienced" (Parent)

Ultimately, the AIFY partners felt their response during the pandemic and school closures demonstrated their strength as a collaborative partnership and their ability to meet the needs of students and families, regardless of circumstance. The AIFY partners are also committed to working in new and different ways moving forward, as things continue to shift in our environment. However, while adapting and evolving, the partners will always stay focused on their vision and mission, which is to support the wellbeing of students and families in vulnerable school communities.

AIFY SUPPORTS:
SERVICE USE,
CAPACITY *and*
IMPORTANCE

AIFY SUPPORTS:
SERVICE USE, CAPACITY
and IMPORTANCE

In this section of the report, we take a closer look at AIFY service use in the school communities for Year 4 (e.g., magnitude of service use, service use trends, capacity of service providers). We also provide details, when available, about service use during AIFY schools closures (From March 2020 to August 2020). The section ends with stakeholder perspectives on the importance of the AIFY initiative.

Year 4 Service Use and Capacity

The following visual provides a snapshot of the magnitude of AIFY service use for Year 4 (the 2019/2020 school year). Year 4 is unique compared to previous years of AIFY because of the arrival of COVID-19, and the physical closure of schools that occurred as a result of the pandemic (mid-March 2020 to June 2020). In the visual, some of the counts represent the overall picture of AIFY service use for the whole school year, from September to June (i.e., for Success Coaching, Mental Health Therapy, and Roots and Wings Support) or for different portions of school year (e.g., September to March; A post-COVID response from March to June; For Out-of-School Time, Mentoring, Nutrition Support). The time period each count represents is noted.

Through the evaluation, with the help of AIFY partners, we can also describe what AIFY service use looks like for students and families who were accessing one or more targeted AIFY supports across the AIFY schools (i.e., supports that are not universal, but meant to support students and families with more specific needs). In the AIFY model of support, nutrition supports are considered universal, but mentoring, success coaching, mental health therapy, roots and wings support, and out-of-school-time are considered targeted supports.

NUTRITION SUPPORT

219,996 meals served throughout the school year across all 5 AIFY schools (Sept 2019 to Feb 2020)

250 emergency supplementary food packages provided to families (Sept 2019 to Dec 2019)

1,081 supplementary food packages provided to families during school closures (Post COVID - April 2020 to Aug 2020)

MENTORING

234 Elementary and Junior High students benefited from a mentoring relationship (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

35 Virtual matches made between students and mentors (Post COVID - May 2020 to Aug 2020)

MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY

182 Students and their Family members served as formal clients

9 Presentations

28 Groups facilitated

671 Short-Term Engagements with students and families

SUCCESS COACHING

56 students served as Formal Clients

4,388 Short Term Engagements with 807 students or family members

25 Groups facilitated

56 Critical Incidents supported

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

597 Students served during the school year (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

39 Short-Term Engagements with Students and Families (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

11 Critical Incidents Supported (Sept 2019 to March 2020)

80 Family activity kits provided during school closures (Post COVID - April 2020 to May 2020)

45 Students attended in-person summer programming and 18 attended online (July 2020 to Aug 2020)

ROOTS AND WINGS FAMILY SUPPORT

12 Critical Incidents supported

64 Families Served as Formal Clients

1,436 Short-Term Engagements with 383 individuals from AIFY Families
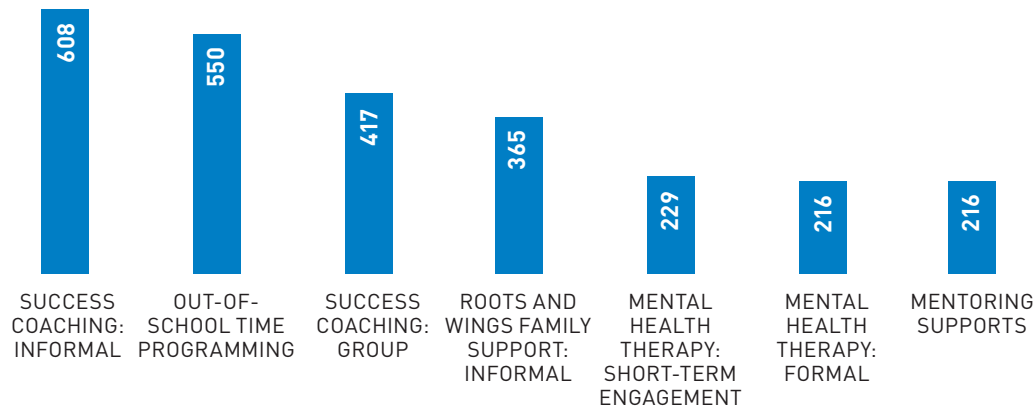
FOR *Year* ❹

1,448 students and their families accessed 1 or more targeted AIFY supports

- This is 62% of the total number of students enrolled in the five AIFY schools (N = 2,343).
- 51% (n = 740) of these students were Male and 49% (n = 708) were Female*
- 26% were ELL students (n = 374)
- 11% were refugee students (n = 162)
- 27% were self-identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students (n = 390)
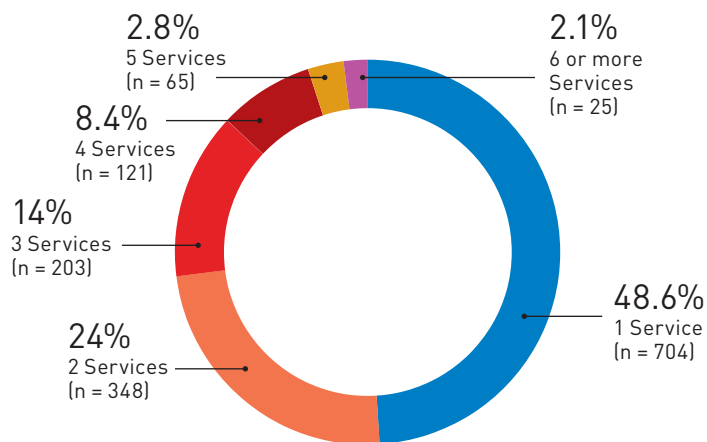- 15% were students with Special Needs (n = 218)

Across the five AIFY schools, there were also some specific services/supports that were accessed by more of these students. The following chart presents the most accessed AIFY services for Year 4 (accessed by 200 or more students).

* AIFY and the evaluation team want to acknowledge that we do not believe only male and female categories represent gender. We acknowledge that there are many different types of gender, people may identify with more than one type of gender, there could be fluidity between gender types, or people may identify as non-gendered. Unfortunately, the measure of gender in this report, which is from the partnering school Divisions, does not yet capture the spectrum of gender types present among students in these school communities and was the only measure of student gender available for use in this evaluation. The AIFY school partners are currently in the process of re-defining their gender measure to make it more inclusive and we hope to be able to report on the full spectrum of gender among AIFY students in the future.

YEAR 4: TYPES OF AIFY SERVICES ACCESSED MOST

Service	Value
SUCCESS COACHING: INFORMAL	608
OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMMING	550
SUCCESS COACHING: GROUP	417
ROOTS AND WINGS FAMILY SUPPORT: INFORMAL	365
MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY: SHORT-TERM ENGAGEMENT	229
MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY: FORMAL	216
MENTORING SUPPORTS	216

Students and families may need to access multiple supports in order to have their complex needs met and aim for better outcomes. In Year 4, just under 50% of AIFY cohort students accessed only 1 targeted support. The remaining AIFY cohort students accessed 2 or more targeted AIFY supports during the 2019/2020, with most of these students accessing between 2 to 4 AIFY services. This demonstrates the complexity of need for these students and their families and how multiple AIFY supports can wraparound students and their families as a result.

2.8%
5 Services
(n = 65)

2.1%
6 or more Services
(n = 25)

8.4%
4 Services
(n = 121)

14%
3 Services
(n = 203)

48.6%
1 Service
(n = 704)

24%
2 Services
(n = 348)

In addition to the magnitude of the Year 4 AIFY support use, the capacity required for these supports also needs to be considered. In Year 4, as in previous years, many agency staff found themselves working above their expected capacity or had more demand for their services/support than they could provide (See note box for an example of this demand vs. capacity challenge experienced by Out-of-School Time programming in some of the AIFY schools).

This demand versus capacity challenge is usually the result of the persistent or growing needs in the AIFY school communities (e.g., students and families have complex needs that require long-term interventions and support; more students/ families are self-referring or seeking our AIFY supports). However, the pandemic and its impact on the lives of students and their families also contributed to these challenges and resulted in many agency staff having larger volumes of work than in previous years. It is also important to note that agency staff shifted how they offered support to students and families during this time, based on the changing needs of

NOTE:

Some of the AIFY supports, like Out-Of-School Time (OST), have a limited capacity of students they can serve, based on the number of OST staff or volunteers they are able to have in each AIFY school. For example, OST agency staff at Delton, JAM, and St. Alphonsus were able to track their requests for OST compared to their enrollment capacity.

- Delton could only enroll 54% – 59% of its OST enrollment requests for fall (Sept to Dec) and winter (Jan to March) programs

- JAM was able to fulfill 78% – 83% of its OST enrollment requests for fall (Sept to Dec) and winter (Jan to March) programs

- St. Alphonsus was only able to fulfill 65% – 76% of its OST enrollment requests for fall (Sept to Dec) and winter (Jan to March) programs

None of the AIFY schools that had registered OST programming were able to meet the demand for OST support from AIFY families. Only one school was close to meeting the demand for OST support and in another school, the demand for support was almost 50% greater than the capacity of the OST support. These data provide a good example of the high level of need for AIFY supports in Year 4.

students and families. The pandemic caused big disruptions in the environment and in the stability of some families. As a result, many students and families needed more help meeting their basic needs (e.g., food support, financial support etc.). Based on the work of Maslow and his hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), AIFY partners understood that in order for students and families to continue to thrive and be resilient, their fundamental, basic needs must be met first (e.g., having access to food, shelter, feeling secure and safe, etc.) before students and families can be expected to work on meeting growth needs (e.g., working on personal achievement goals, like educational goals; McLeod, 2018). Over the years and even amid this global pandemic, AIFY agency staff have worked hard to meet families where they were at and be responsive to their changing needs, so students and families can still work towards meeting their full potential. In addition to helping students and families meet their basic needs during this time, agency staff were also focused on helping students and families sustain protective factors in their lives (e.g., access to supports, connection to caring adults, etc.), so they could be resilient in these difficult times. AIFY agency staff were focused on keeping families strong (e.g., in their relationships), so students and families could be protected from the risks of social disruption due to COVID-19 (Prime et al., 2020).

It is also important to note that in addition to working directly with students and/or their families in the school communities, agency staff spend a lot of time in meetings, collaborating to deliver services, and connecting with students/families informally (i.e., working on short-term engagements with students and families). All of these activities also require a lot of time and energy from agency staff and would be done in addition to the work they do for their formal or expected caseloads.

AIFY agency staff also completed a survey about their workloads (n = 18 completed staff surveys) and shared that one of most demanding parts of their work is trying to keep up with the demand for their support. There are many students and families who need support in the AIFY schools and it's hard "keeping up with the volume of need".

> *"The hardest aspect of my work to handle was the number of students who needed support and finding a balance in short term clients and formal clients."* (Agency Staff)

Some staff also shared how the pandemic has made their work more stressful.

> *"It is very stressful when I am concerned about a child that is at risk, and I am unable to make contact with them, or when parents are gatekeeping my ability to support a child -I have never been busier and my caseload has never been higher -as service providers, we jumped right into a new way of working and supporting others and never really had our own chance to process all of the changes that impacted us due to the pandemic -holding hope for everyone is exhausting when I am also being affected"* (Agency Staff)

Still, even with the high volume of need, the challenges some agency staff can experience with their workloads, and new challenges agency staff are experiencing due to the pandemic, agency staff are committed to their work and making a difference in the school communities they support.

> *"We are still completely and whole-heartedly committed to supporting the students and families we serve in a new way"* (Agency Staff)

> *"It's demanding work and can leave me feeling drained, but seeing the growth in a child or sharing a bonding moment with them makes everything worth it."* (Agency Staff)

> *"[This] is a special school...it really has a piece of my heart. The students, staff and the AIFY team are all amazing humans. I love working with an AIFY team that is just as passionate and strength based as I am.... I feel lucky to have been a part of the [this school] team."* (Agency Staff)

IN THE **LIT:**

The research tells us that families, especially those who experience more vulnerability or risk factors, tend to be more susceptible to social disruptions and other negative outcomes when faced with extreme stress, like they were during the pandemic. However, families that are able to maintain protective factors during times of stress, like strong relationships or access to professional supports, will likely cope better and be more resilient during these unprecedented times (Prime, Wade, & Browne, 2020).

"[This school] is full of very resilient and wonderful kids, who I am honoured to walk with." (Agency Staff)

AIFY Service Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic

AIFY service delivery did not stop as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. When school closed mid-March 2020, AIFY, like many other service providers in Alberta and the nation, adapted and evolved so they could continue supporting the even more critical needs of students and families in the AIFY school communities.

Before COVID, the AIFY model of support was designed to be collaborative, school-based, and in-person. Now, as a result of COVID and the school closures that occurred from March 2020 to June 2020, AIFY adapted its modes of service delivery, but still remains collaborative. These adaptations were made as quickly as possible to ensure the students and families from each of the AIFY school communities could still access the supports they needed for the remainder of the 2019/2020 school year. Below we describe how the different AIFY agency partners changed their service delivery and how students and families continued to use the AIFY supports during school closures.

e4c Support. Prior to school closures, e4c provided nutrition support to each AIFY school community by providing meals (e.g., lunches, snacks) each day for students. When schools had to close in March, e4c wanted to ensure families experiencing food insecurity could still have access to reliable and sufficient nutrition during school closures. To do this, e4c connected directly with AIFY School Administrators to find out which families were struggling with food insecurity during school closures. School Administrators provided lists of families they felt needed this support and e4c put together supplementary food packages for these families. **From April 2020 to August 2020, 1,081 supplementary food packages were provided to AIFY families across the five schools.**

 # OF SUPPLEMENTARY FOOD PACKAGES BY AIFY SCHOOL

DELTON	JOHN A. MCDOUGALL	ST. ALPHONSUS	SPRUCE AVENUE	EASTGLEN
181	115	375	260	150
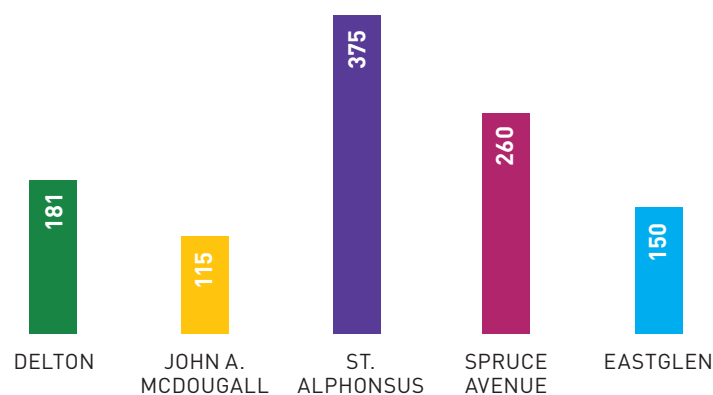
These supplementary food packages included essential items for good nutrition (e.g., carrots, potatoes, apples, lentils, beans, tortillas, bread). Recipes and safety tips were also included so families could have additional information about how to prepare the foods provided, if needed.

The Family Centre Supports. When schools first closed, The Family Centre (TFC) agency staff (Success Coaches, Mental Health Therapists, and Roots and Wings Family Support Workers) helped students get set up for online schooling, helped families get the hardware they needed to connect to online schooling and supports (e.g., Chrome books), helped students and families navigate their Google Classrooms, and helped students with their school work. For each TFC service specifically:

- **Success Coaching.** The AIFY Success Coaches adapted quickly and moved online to continue working with students, who responded very well to this shift in service

delivery. **Many of the children and youth seemed to prefer connecting via these remote channels. Some even became more vulnerable and were more open and honest online with Success Coaches.** Also, before the pandemic, success coaches would mainly interact with and support students. **After school closures, many more parents and caregivers were connecting with Success Coaches to talk about their family dynamics and how they are coping with social isolation.** To illustrate these connection increases for Success Coaches after school closures, The Family Centre tracked how many clients connected with AIFY success coaches for support in March 2020 and then in April 2020 when schools were closed. In March 2020, Success Coaches connected with 192 clients in the AIFY schools. In April, 214 clients connected with success coaches.

- **Roots and Wings Family Support.** The Family Centre adapted its service delivery by working to connect with children and families by phone, video, or in-person (when necessary and following health guidelines) soon after schools were closed in mid-March. The main priority was to identify the most vulnerable families in each of the AIFY school communities and coordinate support with AIFY teams. For Roots and Wings family support workers, their initial focus was the basic needs like food and finance needs. **Roots and Wings workers worked to make sure families had enough food (in collaboration with e4c) and helped families complete applications for financial assistance. Families responded positively to this support and were very thankful for this immediate response to their needs when schools first closed.** As time went on, Roots and Wings support workers began having more therapeutic and transformative conversations with families. Conversations about their stress levels, family relationships, parenting challenges, coping, safety planning, etc. Roots and Wings workers continued to support these families as they worked through all of these new or intensified complexities in their lives. **Roots and Wings Family Support workers also saw an increase in family connections for support from March 2020 to April 2020. In March 2020, 85 clients across the AIFY schools were connected to Roots and Wings Family Workers for support. In April 2020, after schools were closed due to the pandemic, 202 clients were connected with the AIFY Roots and Wings Support across the 5 AIFY schools. This is more than double the connections made in March when schools were still open for first two weeks of the month.**

- **Mental Health Therapy.** When school first closed in March, AIFY Mental Health Therapists began contacting all the families they supported by phone, to let them know mental health support was still available. Therapists had to be flexible and willing to adapt though since connecting with some students and families was difficult. For example, some families were not engaging with online learning and therapists struggled to connect with these families, to ensure they were safe. Therapists were also especially worried about some families being at higher risk for domestic violence or abuse.

Maintaining connections with all families was very important and therapists had to be creative and persistent to keep these connections intact. With other clients, therapists noticed they had more access to parents and they saw communication increase with some families, which also meant the therapist was better able to support the family's mental health issues. Unfortunately, but understandably, AIFY therapists saw large increases in their client's stress and anxiety levels, related to the pandemic. Therapists also saw increases in parental stress due to parent/child conflict about schooling and reduced income for many families. Many students also reported feeling isolated from their peers and social connections. For some students, online learning was difficult and their engagement and performance suffered. During school closures, therapists saw how important a safe school environment is for children and that schools are a safety net that help families meet their basic needs. Schools also play an important role in maintaining the safety and security of children coming from homes who are experiencing poverty, joblessness, or exposure to violence.

In March 2020, all the Mental Health Therapists were trained and certified in Telehealth to do therapy safely and securely by video calls. Once certified, therapists began both individual and family therapy by Google Meet or Doxy.me (Platforms that comply with security and privacy standards). These new modes of service delivery proved to be an effective medium for therapy. Some people felt safer doing therapy from the comfort of their home and became more open and vulnerable during therapy. Some students who had poor in-person attendance were able to attend therapy and class more often when it was remote. Therapists also noticed they could build stronger therapeutic relationships with clients when they were able to see into their homes (e.g., meet the family pet). Many clients and families also demonstrated resilience during the time of school closures and quickly adapted to the changes in therapy service delivery.

BGCBigs Supports. One of the first adaptations BGCBigs made to connect with AIFY families was to develop a 'Wellness Call' protocol so agency staff could reach out to its families and find out what their immediate needs were with schools closed from March 2020 to June 2020. **BGCBigs attempted 1,376 wellness calls to families from March to June and reached 491 families, to check in and find out what their support needs were** (calls could take anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour, on average). During these calls, agency staff used a survey to collect information about a family's situation and their specific needs. **From April to June, 515 surveys were completed** (with some families completing the survey more than one time). From these surveys, BGCBigs found out that of the AIFY families they connected with, 95 families experienced a change in employment status from April to June (e.g., Temporarily laid off, reduced hours, permanent lay off) and 87 families reported a need for food (These families represent approximately 300 people). From April to part of May, BGCBigs made supplementary food packages for families and then for the rest of May and into June, families were referred to the Food Bank if they needed food (BGCBigs would still provide supplementary food packages though if a family encountered any problems accessing food from other service providers, like not being able to physically get to the food bank to pick up food. In total, **BGCBigs provided 139 supplementary food packages to AIFY families.**

Other supports families said they needed were related to:

• Youth Employment support (71 families)

• Student High School completion support (59 families)

• Post-secondary application support (51 families)

• Filling out paperwork for government support (21 families)

• Accessing information about government supports (27 families)

• Wellness or mental health support (35 families)

When BGCBigs could not directly support the needs identified by families (with staff working in AIFY schools or staff working for BGCBigs, but not linked directly to an AIFY school) they helped families get connected to external community agencies to get the support they needed. Families were referred to places like Caregivers Alberta, 811, The Family Centre, Stollery Children's Hospital, The Food Bank, Jewish Family Services, Triple P Parenting, e4c, United Way, etc.

BGCBigs adapted service delivery methods in an attempt to maintain these services for students. For mentoring, BGCBigs worked throughout the school closures to transition some matches from in-person to online. BGCBigs also transitioned some of their agency staff so they would become virtual mentors for students in the AIFY schools. BGCBigs staff mentors developed caring relationships with students where they set goals for students and engaged in fun virtual activities together. Overall, 35 students participated in a virtual mentor match. For Out-of-School Time, BGCBigs had staff create virtual programming that students could access each day of the week during school closures.

With financial support from ECF, BGCBigs collaborated with REACH Edmonton to create activity kits for families who needed this kind of support (183 families said they needed an activity kit and these families would have received at least 1 kit from March to June). These kits provided families with supplies (e.g., Colouring sheets, games, side walk chalk) for families so their children could have things to engage with during non-schooling hours and on weekends. BGCBigs also developed a child minding service, where a family cohort would have the opportunity to get out of the house and visit one of the club locations (e.g., McCauley) where children could get help with academics and participate in physical activities. 11 AIFY families were able to access this child minding service during March to June.

Finally, BGCBigs staff in the AIFY schools also supported families in their efforts to help children and families use computers for their online programming and/or school work. Staff also helped families with needs related to accessing additional critical supports (e.g., coordinating transportation for families to get to appointments, coordinating respite care)

Getting AIFY Families Connected. As all the AIFY agency partners began to reach out to the AIFY families from each of the school communities, to find out their immediate needs with schools closed, it became clear many families did not have access to the technology needed to engage in online schooling and supports (e.g., families did not have laptops/computers for children to use for schooling, families did not have internet access, families had limited technology literacy and could not engage online). For example, from their wellness calls to families, BGCBigs began hearing from families that they did not have access to a computer. As a result, AIFY agency partners either sought out funds to purchase and provide computers to AIFY families or connected with other community partners (e.g., United Way, community foundations, school board partners) to coordinate efforts to get computers to families. Specifically, the Muttart Foundation and the Edmonton Community Foundation provided funds to buy computers as needed for students and families. United Way then coordinated this effort with school board partners so computers could be given directly to schools, who could get them to the students and family. Overall:

- 496 computers (e.g., Chromebooks, desktops) were given to AIFY students and families (many of these purchased with Muttart and ECF funds)

- The Family Centre agency staff helped to distribute 476 of these computers to AIFY students and families

- The United Way offered to cover basic internet costs for families who could not afford this service for the rest of the 2019/2020 school year

Access to Supports. On a family survey we asked parents and caregivers about their ability to access support from the AIFY schools when schools were closed due to the pandemic. Parent/caregivers reported the following about accessing supports from the school when it was closed:

62%
(n = 23) said their children can still access the supports they need.

49%
(n = 18) said they were still able to access the supports they need as a parent/caregiver.

82%
of parents/caregivers (n = 31) said some of the people who work in the schools have continued to support them and their family.

AIFY Service Use Trends Over Time

For Year 4 of the AIFY evaluation, we were also able to start exploring how AIFY service use has looked over the last three years (for targeted AIFY supports), From Year 2 to Year 4.

Over the last three years, approximately 2,784 students have accessed 1 or more targeted AIFY support for at least one school year. Since Year 2 (2017/2018 school year), each of the AIFY schools have provided targeted supports to the following number of students and their families (Counts represent students because that is how services used by students and/or their families are tracked, service use is linked back to the student, but students and their family members are often accessing supports, not just students):

- **466** students at **Delton Elementary**
- **488** students at **John A. McDougal Elementary**
- **514** students at **St. Alphonsus Elementary and Junior High**
- **501** students at **Spruce Avenue Junior High**
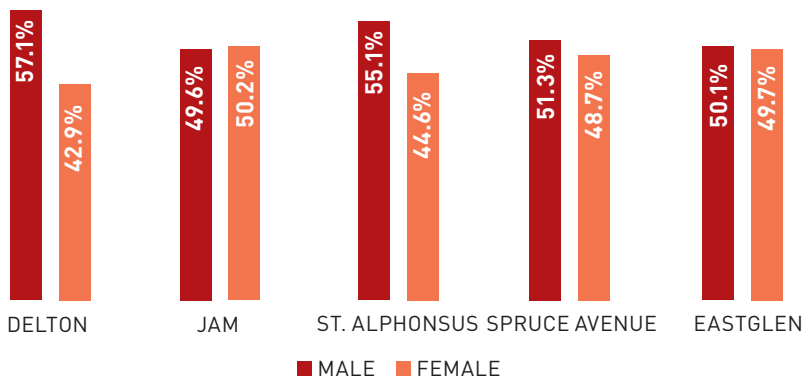- **876** students at **Eastglen High School**

Overall, slightly more of these students were male,

AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y4): GENDER DISTRIBUTION

53% Male

47% Female
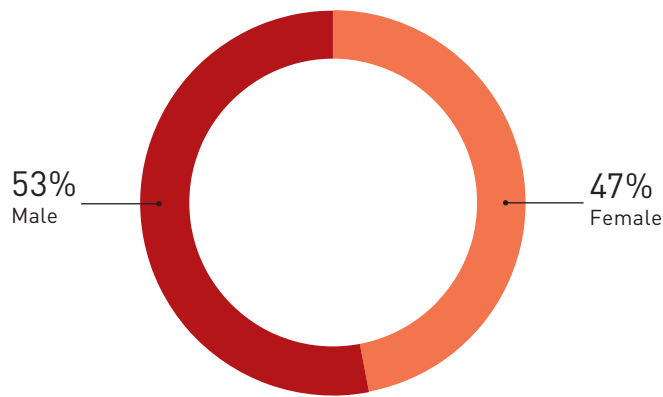
But broken down by school, we see noticeably more male students in some AIFY schools accessing the targeted AIFY supports during the last three years. For example, 55% of the students accessing targeted supports in St. Alphonsus were male and almost 60% were male in Delton.

AIFY SERVICE USE (OVERALL): GENDER DISTRIBUTION BY SCHOOL

	Male	Female
DELTON	57.1%	42.9%
JAM	49.6%	50.2%
ST. ALPHONSUS	55.1%	44.6%
SPRUCE AVENUE	51.3%	48.7%
EASTGLEN	50.1%	49.7%

■ MALE ■ FEMALE

* AIFY and the evaluation team want to acknowledge that we do not believe only male and female categories represent gender. We acknowledge that there are many different types of gender, people may identify with more than one type of gender, there could be fluidity between gender types, or people may identify as non-gendered. Unfortunately, the measure of gender in this report, which is from the partnering school Divisions, does not yet capture the spectrum of gender types present among students in these school communities and was the only measure of student gender available for use in this evaluation. The AIFY school partners are currently in the process of re-defining their gender measure to make it more inclusive and we hope to be able to report on the full spectrum of gender among AIFY students in the future.

We have also been able to track the trends in grades for AIFY students accessing targeted AIFY supports from Year 2 to Year 4. Across the year, 44%-50% of the AIFY students were in elementary grades (Kindergarten to Grade 6). Around 1/3 were from High School Grades (26% - 33%; Grade 10 to 12). Looking at trends over time in grade levels, we see that in Year 4, there was a 6% increase in high school students accessing targeted supports.

AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y4): TRENDS IN GRADES SERVED

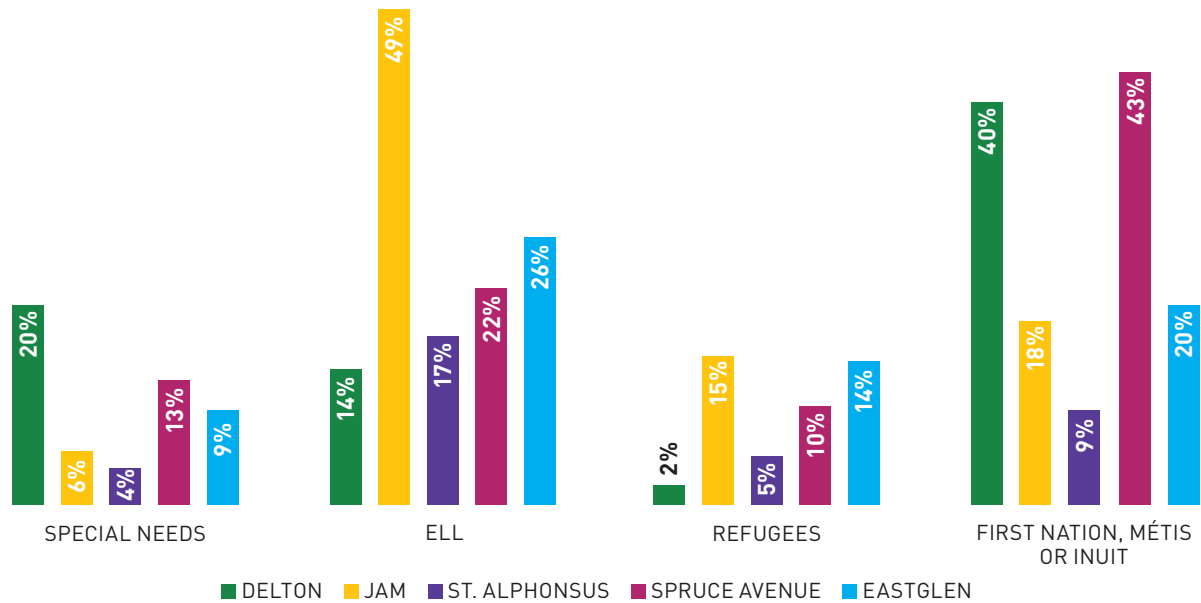|	ELEMENTARY	JUNIOR HIGH	HIGH SCHOOL
YEAR 2	45%	21%	33%
YEAR 3	50%	24%	26%
YEAR 4	44%	25%	32%
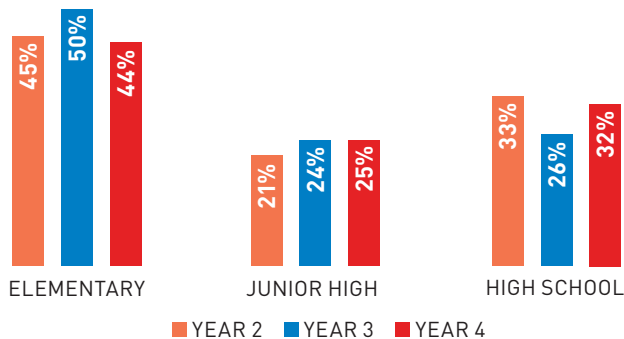
Just like the overall school demographics for the AIFY schools, the students who have accessed targeted AIFY supports for the last three years have also been very diverse. Approximately 1/3 of them have been English Language Learners at one point in the last three years, 1/3 have self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and 10% have been identified as having special needs.

AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y4): SUB-POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

- 10% SPECIAL NEEDS
- 26% ELL
- 10% REFUGEES
- 25% FIRST NATION, MÉTIS OR INUIT
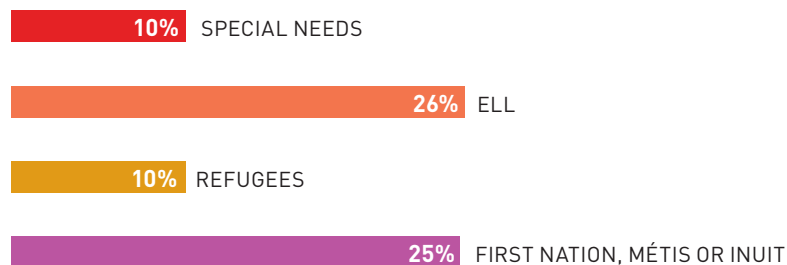
When we look at the proportion of these specific groups of students accessing targeted supports by school, we see some interesting trends.

AIFY SUB-POPULATION SERVICE USE (Y2-Y4) - BY SCHOOL

Legend: DELTON | JAM | ST. ALPHONSUS | SPRUCE AVENUE | EASTGLEN

Category	DELTON	JAM	ST. ALPHONSUS	SPRUCE AVENUE	EASTGLEN
SPECIAL NEEDS	20%	6%	4%	13%	9%
ELL	14%	49%	17%	22%	26%
REFUGEES	2%	15%	5%	10%	14%
FIRST NATION, MÉTIS OR INUIT	40%	18%	9%	43%	20%

A high proportion of Delton and Spruce Avenue students who have accessed targeted AIFY supports have self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (Delton = 40%; Spruce Avenue = 43%). Also, almost 50% of the JAM students who have accessed targeted AIFY supports over the last three years have been English Language Learners. Finally, Delton has the most students accessing targeted supports that also have special needs.

We can also begin to see how many years of service use AIFY students have accessed over the last three years.
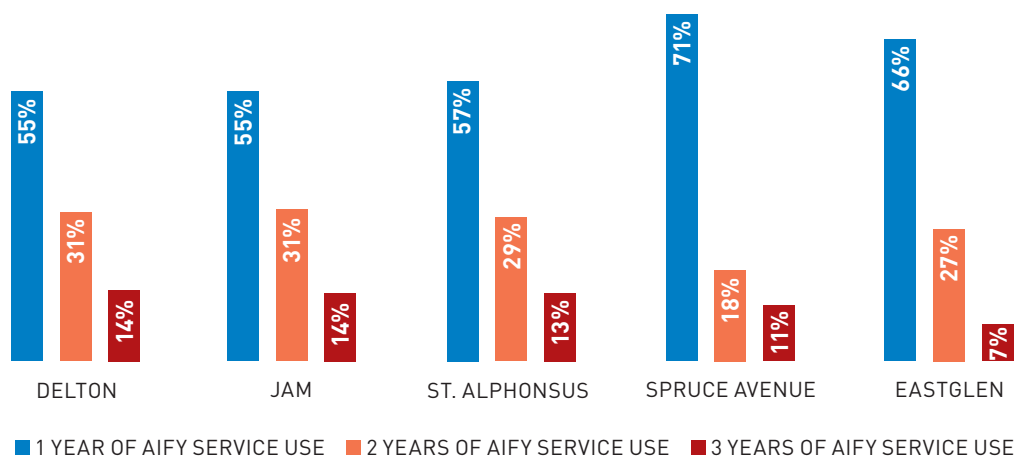
AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y4): YEARS OF SERVICE USE

11.2%
3 Years of AIFY Service use

27.1%
2 Years of AIFY Service use

61.7%
1 Year of AIFY Service use
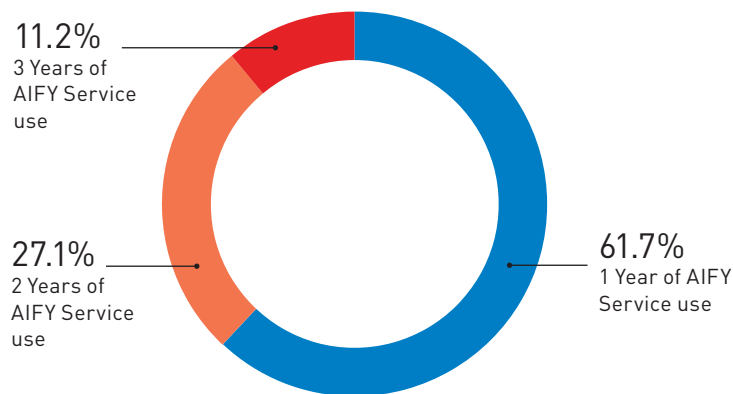
Overall, most of the AIFY students accessing targeted supports tends to do so for only one school year. However, 30% of students have accessed targeted AIFY services for two years (Most do so for two consecutive years) and just over 10% have accessed AIFY targeted supports for the last three years.

We can also break down these yearly service use trends by AIFY school.

YEARS OF AIFY SERVICE USE BY SCHOOL

	DELTON	JAM	ST. ALPHONSUS	SPRUCE AVENUE	EASTGLEN
1 YEAR OF AIFY SERVICE USE	55%	55%	57%	71%	66%
2 YEARS OF AIFY SERVICE USE	31%	31%	29%	18%	27%
3 YEARS OF AIFY SERVICE USE	14%	14%	13%	11%	7%

■ 1 YEAR OF AIFY SERVICE USE ■ 2 YEARS OF AIFY SERVICE USE ■ 3 YEARS OF AIFY SERVICE USE

Across most of the schools, the years of service use trends look similar to the overall picture. However, in Spruce Avenue and Eastglen, most of the students accessing targeted AIFY supports only seem to do so for one year. These trends in years of AIFY service use may also be affected by the high levels of transiency and mobility we see among the AIFY school communities (see *AIFY School Communities* section of this report). With AIFY families moving around a lot, this could explain why more students and their families tend to have only one year of AIFY service use, even when more years of service use would likely be more beneficial to these families.

Importance of Supports

In student and family interviews across the years, we have heard how much students, families, teachers, and school administrators value the AIFY supports in their school communities. These stakeholders also stress how important these supports are for the wellbeing of students and families in our communities. From a Year 4 parent interview, the following quote speaks to the importance of supports for families, but also for society as a whole.

"It will reduce the strain on the social system. You will be able to have more productive adults, who will be able to contribute to society instead of take from it. Because it is giving them support to grow. To be a productive adult."
(Parent)

When asked why the AIFY supports are important, another parent said they are important because "everybody gets a fair chance". Parents also believe without AIFY supports in their school communities, they would not know where to go for help:

"I think without these programs I don't really know where I would turn to."
(Parent)

This is not the first time parents and caregivers have shared that they would not know how to get the supports they need if they were not readily available in the AIFY schools. This demonstrates that the AIFY supports are not only important because of the impact they have on student and family wellbeing, but they are also important because of where students and families are now able to access necessary supports. AIFY supports are accessible directly in the school communities and this helps students and families connect more easily and quickly when needed.

On the Year 4 family survey (completed in June 2020),

84%
of parents/caregivers (n = 31) said the supports/ services they receive from the school are useful.

94%
of parents/caregivers (n = 34) said the supports/services their children receive are useful.

71%
of parents/caregivers (n = 27) said that without the AIFY supports offered by the school, they and their families would not be doing as well.

Families also ranked the top three AIFY supports they felt were most important for their children and for themselves from September 2019 to March 2020. For Year 2 and Year 3, the three most important supports identified by parents and caregivers (n = 71) on the family survey were Out-of-School Time support, Nutrition support, and Counselling support. However, this changed somewhat in Year 4 when parent/ caregivers (n = 39) indicated the Out-of-School Time support, nutrition support, and Roots and Wings Family support were most important. School nutrition program, Out-of-School Time support, and Counselling support were still ranked as the top 3 most important AIFY supports for children in Year 4.

	Y2 RANK	CHILDREN'S RANK Y3	PARENTS'/ CAREGIVERS' RANK Y3	CHILDREN'S RANK Y4	PARENTS'/ CAREGIVERS' RANK Y4
After-School Program	1	1	2	2	1
School Nutrition Program	2	2	1	1	2
Counselling (e.g., child, Family, Adult)	3	3	3	3	
Roots and Wings Family Support					3

School staff also value the AIFY supports because it can be challenging to support all the complex needs of the students and families in the AIFY school communities. School staff from the Edmonton Catholic School Division also completed a school staff survey for the evaluation (n = 19; does not include all school staff working in the AIFY schools) and reported the following when asked about their work as teachers before schools closed due to the pandemic.

58%
of school staff (n = 11) often struggled to balance their teaching responsibilities and the non-educational needs of their students and families.

53%
of school staff (n = 10) had difficulty focusing on their teaching because of the complex needs of students in their school.

58%
of school staff (n = 11) often felt worn out at work by the demands of their job and the complex nature of students and their families.

However, by having the AIFY supports and agency staff working in the schools, school staff also reported they have more support to,

- understand the complexities of students and families (95% agreement; n = 18)
- manage students' disruptive behavior (74% agreement; n = 14)
- help families with their complex needs (95% agreement; n = 18)
- help students with their learning (84% agreement; n = 16)

95% of school staff (n = 18) also felt students were more engaged and 90% (n = 17) felt families were more involved in school with the help of the AIFY supports/agency staff.

Also,

- **95% (n =18) said the AIFY supports and staff have had a positive impact on the wellbeing of students and their families.**

"AIFY is an INVALUABLE part of our school team. Our students cannot learn if they are dealing with mental/emotional/behavioural needs. I am not an expert and cannot give them all they need in this aspect. So many of our students come from backgrounds that require this support. I have seen huge growth and improvement in our students who access AIFY programs at our school." (ECSD School Staff)

"I am happy with all the supports they have provided and am grateful they have continued, especially when education has experienced some major setbacks in funding recently." (ECSD School Staff)

"They have been very supportive to our families during this time! Not sure what we would do without them – they make a HUGE difference in the lives of our families!!!" (ECSD School Staff)

In interviews and the family survey, parents and caregivers also expressed what they thought their life would look like if they could no longer access the school supports. Without access to these supports, families said,

"Without the lunch program, after school care and [school break] programs my wife and I would not be able to put food on the table and put a roof over our heads in normal circumstances. So, they have been amazing" (Parent)

"There would be a lot more fighting in my house. A lot more fighting in my house." (Parent)

"We'd be in much worse places– for mental health." (Parent)

"The counsellor there...is my saving grace... she's phenomenal...like honestly, I think I would be completely lost without her, one hundred percent" (Parent)

On the family survey, we also asked families if their children had to attend a new school, would it be important for that school to have the same supports as the AIFY school they currently attend.

82% of parents/caregivers (n = 32) said that, if their child had to change school, it was very important that the new school have the same supports and services as the AIFY school.

Students, their families, teachers, and school administrators all expressed how much they value and appreciate the AIFY supports in each of their school communities. These stakeholders have come to depend on the AIFY supports and they don't want to imagine life without the AIFY supports in their school communities.

"... it may be hard for someone else to see the benefits, but there [are] benefits there. Whether one might see it or may not...the students who do go to these [schools]...We succeeded in our lives because of these programs and if you take them, it'll only hurt students." (Student)

"I don't ever want to think about doing this work without our partners... I really do feel like it's a critical support for students... we are so fortunate to

have people here who are here every day to connect with students [with] consistent, regular interaction, it's what builds trust. It's hard. I don't want to think about it (life without the AIFY supports). It makes me worried." (School Administrator)

Put simply by an ECSD teacher on the school staff survey when asked about the AIFY supports in their school,

"Please don't ever leave"

LOOKING
forward:
STRIVING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

LOOKING *forward:*
STRIVING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In Year 4, the AIFY partners also began planning for the future of AIFY. Originally, the AIFY Initiative was meant to be a five-year pilot and the hope was that by the end of the fifth year, the initiative would be sustainably funded to maintain and scale out its operations. Over the last four years, the AIFY has been able to demonstrate its impact and the efficiency of its collaborative model of support. Also, based on perceptions of AIFY partners working on the front lines, the AIFY model is proving to be more effective than previous models used to support student and family wellbeing in schools. To date, sustainable funding has not been secured, however the AIFY partners will continue striving to support the sustainability of the AIFY model. In this section of the report, we will provide more details about some of the challenges that are affecting the sustainability efforts and describe how the AIFY partners are working together to address these challenges. In line with this focus on sustainability, the AIFY initiative and its partners are also taking crucial steps to strategize and plan for the future of AIFY, and details about these next steps will also be shared here.

Striving for Sustainability

Throughout the years, the AIFY partners have had some challenges acquiring new and sustainable funding for the initiative. The Steering and Operations partners were asked to reflect on these funding struggles in interviews for the evaluation. From these interviews we heard about key contributors to these challenges. One challenge is the amount of funding needed each year to fund the AIFY operations. The AIFY model of support costs roughly $2.2 million annually (for AIFY supports and services in the 5 AIFY demo schools). We know, based on previous research and compared to other service delivery models used in the past (e.g., fragmented models that do not coordinate efforts to provide wraparound services), that the AIFY model is efficiently using these dollars to more effectively deliver services and meet the complex needs of students and families in the AIFY school communities. However, the annual fundraising needed to cover these costs can add pressure on AIFY partners above and beyond their significant workloads. Annual fundraising can also be challenging as the funding behaviours of donors and funders shift over time, making long-term funding unpredictable.

"It's [a] tricky time. It really is and so putting a ton of pressure on raising money just to keep the base budget whole, is not sustainable. We can't have that amount of money that we have to try to raise just for this initiative on top of everything else. And... it creates these hard conversations year over year... and this is not just with All in For Youth. This is generally across the sector. A lot of these relationships were developed at a time where things were different...the economic environment was different. The fundraising environment was different. And yet we're trying to hang on to that old model in a new world ... and we're wondering why it doesn't [work], well of course it's not gonna work things have changed ..." (Steering Partner)

"When I think about All in For Youth and I think broader contextually to the province of Alberta, I'm actually concerned for its sustainability. We're in a political climate right now that I don't believe is friendly and conducive to this kind of work" (Operations Partner)

"Especially in an environment right now where you know philanthropy is what it is. People are not as inclined, especially now, to give." (Steering Partner)

One important long-term outcome AIFY has been striving to achieve is sustainable funding for this initiative and the goal has always been to scale out, so more vulnerable school communities in Alberta can benefit from this effective and collaborative school-based service delivery model. However, this sustainability is still out of reach.

> *"...I think we're still struggling with the sustainability piece and I'm not sure how we're going to solve that one to be completely honest with you"*
> (Operations Partner)

Unfortunately, with recent and looming provincial cuts expected, due to the impacts of COVID on the province and due to the economic downturn, that was already in motion before the pandemic, it may become even more difficult to support the sustainability of AIFY.

> *"[Our] provincial...budgets were cut, right. And next year they're gonna be cut again. And the following year, they're going to be cut again"* (Steering Partner)

> *"I think it's a kind of a scary time right now. I think that with the cuts that happened to education... and the cuts that happen to...these programs and to other social supports"* (Operations Partner)

> *"...on top of COVID, we've got these huge budget cuts that will affect our vulnerable students."* (Operations Partner)

Ideally, AIFY would become sustainable through provincial government funding.

AIFY might have been developed and tested in Edmonton schools, but this model of support can be implemented in any school across the province. The model would arguably have a greater impact on students and families who experience more complexity and vulnerability in their lives, but the basic foundations of the model, wraparound supports delivered collaboratively within school communities, are considered universal best practices for providing supports to students and families. Also, the research is clear that for wraparound models like AIFY there are economic returns on investments in these types of supports, with students in these types of programs expected to earn higher incomes over time and pay more taxes, reduced costs for justice systems due to decreased criminality, and reduced spending for government support programs with these students relying less on government support programs, like welfare, in the future (Brooks Bowden et al., 2020). Moving forward, the AIFY partners will continue their efforts to communicate the impacts and benefits of the AIFY model so more people (e.g., communities, potential funders, government ministries) can become aware of and learn about this Canadian model of wraparound service delivery and what it will take to make something like this sustainable to more effectively meet the complex needs of students and their families.

The AIFY partners believe this model of support needs to be in more schools, so student and families in Alberta can access critical supports to help them thrive. Into Year 5 and beyond, the partners will are committed to this model and what it can do for students and families in our province. They will continue to be nimble and pivot to meet the needs of AIFY students and families as long as they can.

Planning for The Future

With the end of the AIFY pilot in sight (at the end of the 2020/2021 school year), the partners are now planning for the future of AIFY. Working with two facilitators from the Partnerships and Organizational Development (POD) group at the City of Edmonton, the AIFY partners completed a visioning exercise in January and February 2020. The purpose of this work was to identify learnings from the early years of AIFY and begin to define priorities for the AIFY initiative as it plans for the future. From this exercise, partners realized they needed to think how the AIFY model could be adapted

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IN THE LIT:

Finding sustainable funding for these models of wraparound support is challenging. Sather and Bruns (2016) looked at national trends (USA based) in implementing wraparound and one of the top three challenges identified was "difficulties sustaining funding" (pp. 3170). Throughout the wraparound literature we also see very telling language being used to describe how wraparound models of support are funded. It often requires "braided or blended funding mechanisms" (Sather & Bruns, 2016, pp.3169) and funding from "a sophisticated tapestry of federal, state, and local dollars, as well as private philanthropic sources" (Maier et al., 2020, pp. 10). These funding strategies work, but they are difficult to sustain and not stable over time.

Encouragingly, some places have been able to adopt more sustainable funding approaches to support their wraparound support efforts. In New York state, they created a "robust infrastructure to support the development and sustainability of community schools initiatives (a type of wraparound model of support)" (Maier et al., 2020, pp.3). That meant setting aside increasing amounts of funding in the city budget year over year for community schools (e.g., $100 million in 2016-17 to $250 million in 2019-2020). In Philadelphia, the Mayor's office developed a committee to support their wraparound efforts in schools and provided 'soda tax' funding to sustain their wraparound initiative in schools (Maier et al., 2017). This challenge of sustainable funding will likely only continue as we try to cope with an ongoing pandemic and its impact on peoples' lives. However, Maier et al. (2020) clearly outline where our focus should be moving forward:

"...families are under great stress due to COVID-19 related school closures and economic pressures, and the education and social service sectors face severe budget strains, it is more important than ever to find ways to build on existing services and partnerships to efficiently deliver well-coordinated academic, physical, mental, and social emotional supports for students." (pp.13)

to continue in current fiscal realities and be sustainable in the school communities currently served. As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty in securing resources, the initiative has reduced program expenses. The AIFY partners came together again with the POD facilitators in October and November 2020 to discuss different model adaptions that could reduce the annual operating budget yet maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the AIFY model. Important considerations in these future planning discussions were AIFY's mission, the wisdom and knowledge in the community, the integrated support structure of the model, a two generational approach, universal engagement, a focus on resilient and vulnerable youth, improving the social equity of children, and having operating funds to support more than the five demonstration sites.

Out of these facilitated sessions, the AIFY partners developed a new scenario for AIFY past Year 5. During the development of this scenario, important themes emerged around what the partners wanted to maintain, to take into consideration, and to guide them in making a final decision.

 This included:

• Maintaining evaluation outcomes, specifically around student outcomes

• Keep the integrity of the wraparound model

• Consider the systems in play and other community agencies

• Consider where AIFY services are needed most whether there are other service providers outside of AIFY that can step in to support some communities

• Consider the least impactful cut the initiative can make

• Prioritize schools with high rankings on the Social Vulnerability measurement used by school Divisions

The new scenario all partners decided to move forward would see the AIFY model maintained in the five original demonstration sites with three schools (all within the top 10 most socially vulnerable schools in the city), who originally only received partial AIFY supports, receiving more AIFY supports. Specific types of AIFY services will become centralized across all eight AIFY schools moving forward, to reduce operating costs and so all the schools can benefit from the full AIFY model of support. The AIFY work will continue to be collaborative and will continue to wraparound students and families in these school communities, to make critical supports and services more accessible to students and their families.

> *"It is such an incredible support and I think many students and families choose to either move to our school or stay with our school because of the wraparound supports that are available to them. I think this is an amazing strategy to bring accessible mental health support and many other supports to a community that struggles with poverty, crime and a lack of resources, and this will change the trajectory for many students as they grow up. I wish the AIFY supports were available to every school across Canada!"* (Agency Staff)
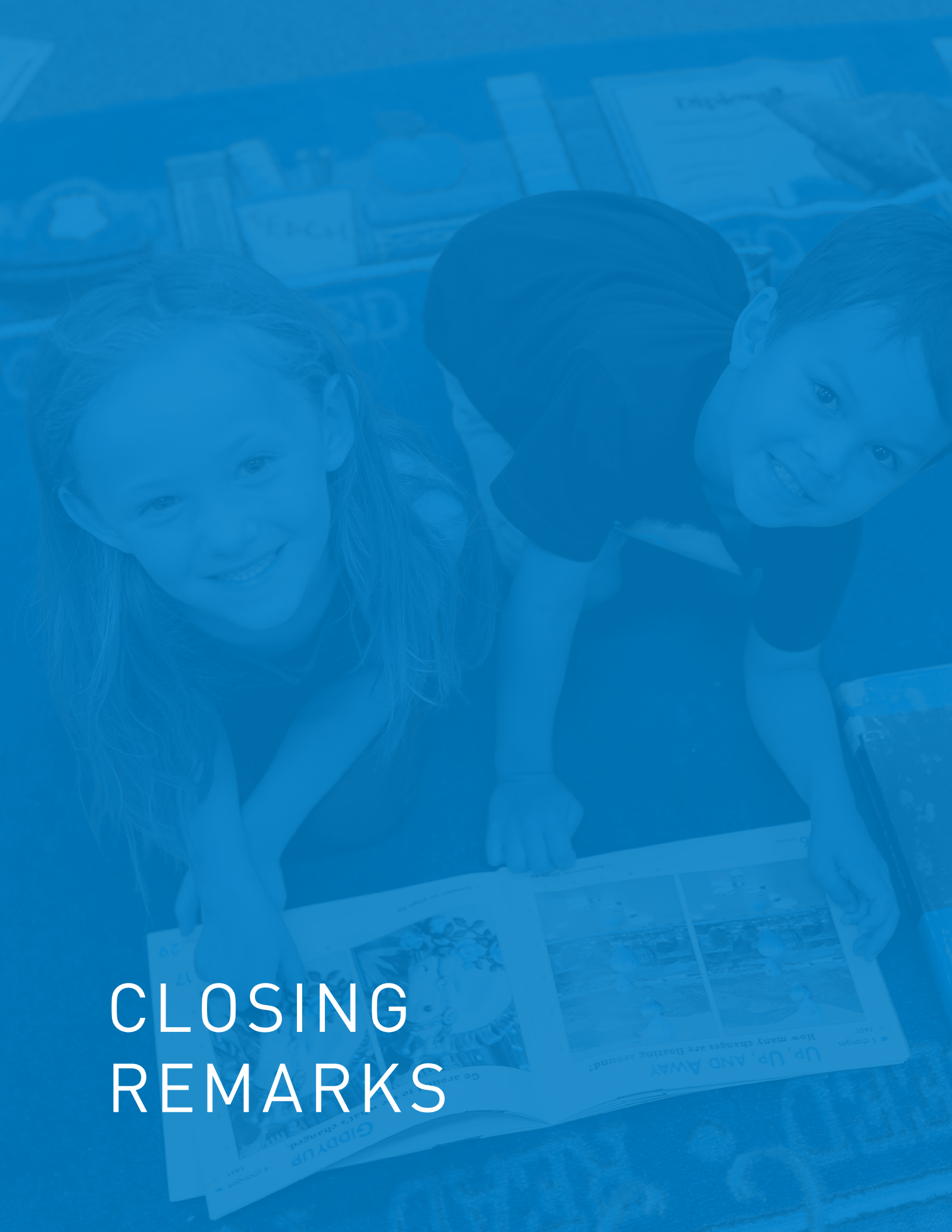
CLOSING REMARKS

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