



all
in **for**
youth

Year **5**
EVALUATION
REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past five years All In For Youth (AIFY) has been providing students and families in some of the most vulnerable school communities in Edmonton with immediate access to wraparound supports. These supports are comprehensive and include school nutrition programs, student and family mental health therapy, student mentoring, student success coaching, out-of-school time care, and in-home family support.

The positive impacts of having AIFY supports have been extensively highlighted in previous years' reports ([Year 4](#) and [Year 3](#)). During the 2020-2021 school year, and Year 5 of AIFY across five demonstration schools, the circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic made the AIFY model of wraparound services more vital than ever before.

AIFY Year 5 Context. UNESCO data indicates that in April 2020, over 90% of learners worldwide were affected by school closures (Ritchie et al., 2021). While the 2020-2021 school year in Alberta began with schools opened for in-person learning, parents and caregivers in Edmonton school divisions were given the option to choose between in-person and online learning at certain times in the year. The operationalization of in-person learning required schools to implement various measures, such as student cohorting, staggered student entries, mask wearing, virtual assemblies, among others.

Students enrolled in in-person learning often experienced the “back and forth” between in-person and online learning as physical isolation of all individuals in a classroom was required when a student or staff contracted COVID-19. These fluctuations in instruction shaped not only the experiences of students, families and school staff (reflected in the quantitative and qualitative data for Year 5), but also the type of evaluation data collected and presented in this year's report. Where applicable throughout this report, we note changes in evaluation data as a result of the pandemic circumstances.

AIFY Year 5 Impacts. Still, because schools and many AIFY supports were considered essential services, they continued to consistently reach students and families despite the ever changing public health mandates implemented in Alberta,

“Even though COVID-19 and online schooling were happening, there was still contact [with AIFY] which was really really good. And we got to have that consistency.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

As a result, AIFY continued to demonstrate its effectiveness and ability to adapt as needed to significant changes to our environments. Pollack, Theodorakakis, and Walsh (2021) found that schools with established wraparound supports were very well equipped to identify and address the needs (academic and non-academic) of students and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was something particularly noted in this year's qualitative data, and reflected in the different outcomes presented in the report (page 19) in relation to:

- Quality Teaching and Learning
- Family Support
- In-School Support
- Out-of-School Support
- Systems Change

In the context of the above outcomes, in particular systems change, this year’s report details how the well-consolidated relationships between the partners made AIFY operations possible during Year 5.

The AIFY Partners

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 (EPSB)	United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

The Last Demonstration Year. For the final AIFY demonstration year in its first five schools, we captured the impact of AIFY through the lens of AIFY alumni (n=6) who were interviewed for this year’s report. The impacts of AIFY in the lives of interviewed alumni are described in the story of Y.Y. (pronouns: they/them/theirs), who represents a summary of all data collected with AIFY alumni. The main purpose was to demonstrate, through storytelling, how AIFY has changed the lives of students it has supported over the past 5 years. Y.Y.’s journey includes details about their adverse life circumstances during high school, and how AIFY staff helped them to continue attending school, trying to keep up with their academic performance and learning, as well as dreaming and seeking possibilities for after graduating from high school.

AIFY Looks Forward.

“AIFY is there to help families and youth, like finance, emotionally, mental health, everything...I think those programs should be offered in every school.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

For many years AIFY partners have seen the benefits of wraparound supports in students’ and families’ lives, and agree with the above quote from an AIFY parent. However, funding for the AIFY model of wraparound supports is still not embedded into provincial systems across Canada. Consequently, AIFY partners continue to work hard to secure funding for the AIFY initiative and its expansion.

What the COVID-19 pandemic has done is heighten civil society’s awareness of the challenges many children and families currently face (e.g., food insecurity, homelessness, mental health issues, etc.). As such, more people have begun to understand that having collaborative initiatives in socially vulnerable school communities helped to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on many children and families, as mechanisms and relationships were already in place to quickly identify and respond to their different needs. The awareness of the complexities, along with the evidence-based, well-demonstrated and documented impacts of AIFY, created funding opportunities to secure the next year of AIFY and its expansion to three additional schools.

Perhaps most importantly, the various challenges posed by the pandemic on school communities evidenced the powerful, trusting, respectful relationships that exist between AIFY partners. These relationships and their characteristics have translated, as one AIFY Steering Partner put it, into a “real willingness” and “commitment” to continue investing in AIFY, and was a key theme in the Year 5 evaluation report.



Year 5 EVALUATION CONTEXT AND DATA SOURCES

The 2020-2021 school year was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the initial shock caused by the pandemic (first declared in March 2020) had passed, schools across Canada started the school year in September 2020 with a number of public health actions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus, as well as protecting the health of students, school communities, and the public health system.

In Alberta, school divisions implemented diverse measures that responded to COVID-19 while considering local contexts and school community needs. Measures included, but were not limited to: mandatory masking, cohorting students, giving parents/caregivers the option to choose between in-person and online learning, transferring entire classrooms to online learning when there was a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the cohort, and not permitting parents/caregivers inside school buildings throughout the school year.

Specifically, Edmonton Public Schools divided the school year into four quarters, allowing families to choose between online or in-person learning each quarter, and restructuring classes in response to the needs of the school community. Similarly, Edmonton Catholic Schools provided families with the choice between online or in-person learning for the school year, and also initiated frequent online events to foster connectedness during these unique times. As cases increased throughout the winter months, schools remained open (after the December 2020 Holidays and the 2021 Spring Break) yet all students moved to online learning. School divisions adapted to the constantly changing landscape of the pandemic despite budget reductions and associated temporary staff layoffs in response to the pandemic in spring of 2020.

School Divisions' Pivots in Response to Covid-19 Measures

Relevant events prior to the 2020-2021 school year

March 16, 2020 – In-person classes canceled indefinitely across Alberta.

April 2020 – ECSD and EPSB faced significant budget reductions, due to a reallocation of resources in response to the growing Covid-19 pandemic, leading to temporary education staff layoffs.

July/August 2020 – EPSB and ECSD high schools divided the 2020-21 school year into 4 quarters. ECSD changed their AIFY St. Alphonsus' school year from a year-round programming to September to June programming. ECSD offered families the choice of in-person or online learning for the first quarter and then provided families choices for in-person and online learning for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year. EPSB offered families the choice of in-person or online learning for each quarter. ECSD and EPSB developed safety procedures for in-person learning (e.g., masking, cohorting).

Significant events during the 2020-2021 school year

October 2020 – In ECSD, parents/caregivers were given the option to have their children attend school either in person or online through the 2020-2021 school year (other than when directed by the Minister of Education that students would attend online). As such ECSD created grade specific (i.e., K-6, 7-9 and 10-12) online schools. EPSB provided families with the choice of in-person or online learning for Quarter 2 of the school year.

November 30, 2020 – In-person classes moved online due to a state of public health emergency across Alberta.

January 2021 – At home learning continued for the first week of January due to the continued state public health emergency across Alberta. Classes scheduled to be in-person resumed with in-person delivery on January 11th. EPSB provided families with the choice of in-person or online learning for Quarter 3 of the school year. ECSD remained flexible to families' requests to move to online learning.

March 2021 – EPSB provided families with the choice of in-person or online learning for Quarter 4 of the school year. ECSD families who expressed interest in moving online for the final months of the school year could request it.

April 22, 2021 – All secondary students in the province were directed by the Government of Alberta to move online for a couple of weeks.

May 3, 2021 – In-person classes for junior and high school students across EPSB and ECSD moved online due to targeted regional health measures across Alberta.

May 7, 2021 – In-person classes for all students moved online due to health measures across Alberta. Classes scheduled to be in-person resumed with in-person delivery on May 25th.

June 2021 – The school year concluded at the end of June.

The stressors of the 2020-2021 school year were unparalleled, and the “back and forth” between in-person and online was strongly felt by AIFY students and families. It was in this context that the Year 5 evaluation data was collected. As a result, all AIFY partners helped to prioritize the collection of key data for this year's evaluation. Similar to last year's evaluation, some survey response rates continued to be lower than expected for Year 5, and data collection efforts were adapted to follow public health restrictions. For instance, qualitative interviews and focus groups were conducted online or over the telephone, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis and reporting purposes.

NOTE:

In addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were many other stressors happening in Canada and worldwide. Increased racism, discrimination, and hate crimes were experienced by Asian Canadians since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lou, et al., 2021; VPB, 2020). Moreover, in response to an unarmed black man's (George Floyd) tragic murder at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis, the United States, Black Lives Matter movements happened across Canada and globally. These movements brought attention to institutionalized and systemic racism and discrimination affecting Black people and communities (Leitch, et al., 2020; Potvin, 2020).

The Year 5 findings presented in this report were informed by the following AIFY evaluation data sources:

<h3 style="margin: 0;">FAMILY SURVEY</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">Completed online (May – July 2021) by 21 parents/caregivers from the 5 AIFY schools</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">STUDENT SURVEY</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">Completed online (June 2021) by 166 students from 1 AIFY school (Does not represent all students or the other AIFY schools for year 5)</p>
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STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">17</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">Students in online focus groups (from 4 AIFY schools. The AIFY school that participated in the student survey did not participate in a focus group)</p>	<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">29</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">School Staff (including AIFY school administrators) in online focus groups (from 5 AIFY schools)</p>
<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">6</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">AIFY Alumni Students in telephone interviews</p>	<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">15</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">Parents/Caregivers in telephone interviews</p>
<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">10</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">Operations Partners interviewed online over Zoom</p>	<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">11</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">Steering Committee Partners interviewed online over Zoom</p>
<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">1</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">School Administrator (from a non-AIFY school) interviewed online over Zoom</p>	

SECONDARY DATA FROM AGENCY PARTNERS

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

EXISTING RESEARCH LITERATURE

Peer-reviewed literature and grey literature gathered to support Year 5 evaluation findings (e.g., research literature about the impacts of COVID-19 on children, youth, and families, reports on changes implemented in schools in response to the pandemic)

DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

Meeting notes from AIFY meetings held during the 2020-2021 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 2020-2021 school year (e.g., document about service delivery during the pandemic)

SECONDARY DATA FROM SCHOOL PARTNERS

<p>Student Resilience Survey Completed by n=558 Grade 4 – 12 students across the 5 AIFY schools in December 2020 – May 2021. <i>Note: The resilience survey completion varied between AIFY schools and within schools. The variance was due to school schedules and demands created by the pandemic.</i></p>	<p>AIFY School Data (e.g., Student demographics for AIFY schools, high social vulnerability ranking data for each AIFY school)</p>
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SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

ECSD and EPSB’s respective Instagram™, Facebook™, and website news pages were used to trace back different operational measures the school divisions took in response to COVID-19





The AIFY
SCHOOL
COMMUNITIES

The AIFY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

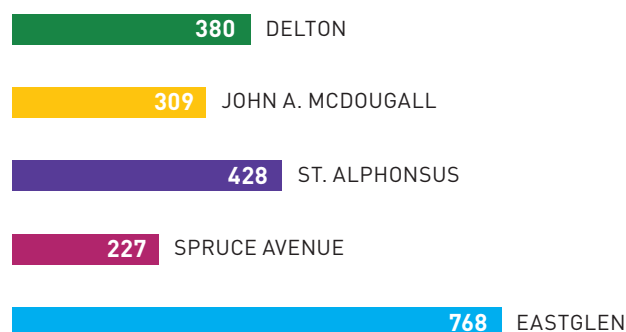
There are five AIFY Schools in Central Edmonton that continue to be part of AIFY during Year 5 (the 2020/2021 school year):

- **Delton Elementary School** (K to Grade 6)
- **John A. McDougall Elementary School** (K to Grade 6)
- **St. Alphonsus Catholic Elementary/Junior High** (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

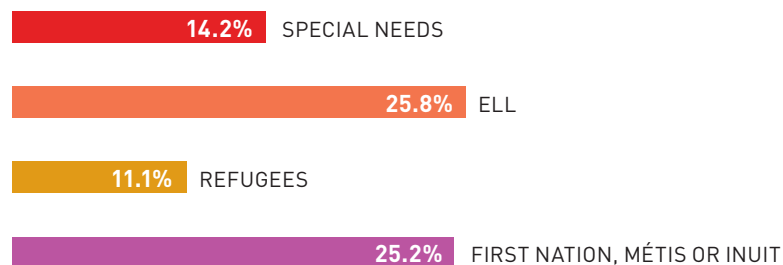
In Year 5, approximately **2,112 students and their families** were part of these five AIFY school communities (i.e., all students and their families, not just students and families who access targeted AIFY supports).

AIFY SCHOOLS: Y5 STUDENT ENROLMENT



For Year 5, each of the AIFY schools saw their overall enrolment counts **decrease** from the previous year (a decrease of 231 students across all five schools, ranging from 16 to 82 students in each school; 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 will also be some overlap in students who identify with each of these sub-groups).

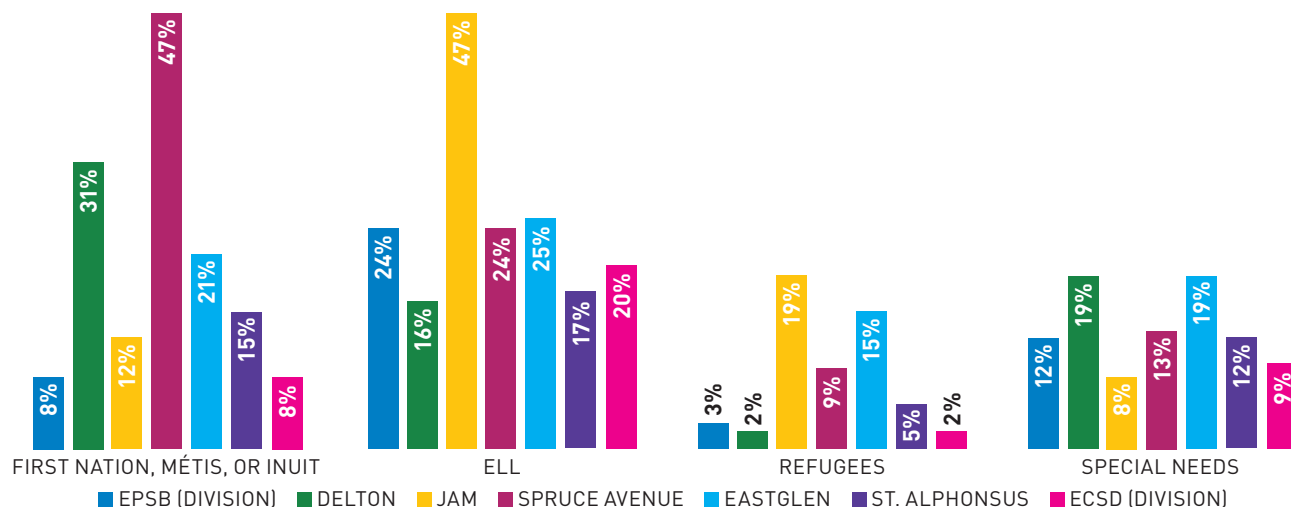


IN THE LIT:

Families who face vulnerability along socio-economic or minority status experienced, and continue to experience, disproportionate risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ethically diverse and low income communities have experienced higher unemployment rates and higher levels of COVID-19 exposure and have reported high stress and mental health concerns. These findings can be attributed to systemic health inequities such as insecure employment, inadequate housing, poor nutrition, and limited access to health resources, among other contributors (MHCC, 2021).

Compared to Division averages, the AIFY schools also tend to have higher proportions of these specific student populations. The following chart illustrates this unique feature of the AIFY schools.

SUB-POPULATION ENROLMENT - DIVISION COMPARISON



All of the AIFY schools tend to have higher proportions of these specific student populations compared to the Edmonton Public School and Edmonton Catholic School Division averages (the blue and purple bars in the chart).

In particular:

- All five AIFY schools have notably higher proportions of self-identified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, with Delton and Spruce Avenue having the largest proportions. This rate is 4X the EPSB average, up from 3X in Year 4.
- For St. Alphonsus, the proportion of refugees (5%) and special needs (12%) is above ECSD average, while the proportion of ELL students (17%) is relative to the ECSD average (20%).
- For ELL students, JAM has almost double the proportion of these students compared to the EPSB average.
- Eastglen, Spruce Avenue and JAM have a much higher proportion of refugee students (more than 3-6X the rate of the EPSB average)
- Delton and Eastglen have a higher proportion of students with special needs compared to the EPSB average.

Comparing the demographic data from the AIFY schools to the Division average illustrates the diversity, complexity, and uniqueness of these AIFY school communities. Social complexity is one of the greatest factors of risk when looking at demographics, therefore, another important layer of complexity to consider for the AIFY schools is their social vulnerability. Each Division (EPSB and ECSD) ranks their most socially vulnerable schools using the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) (i.e., an evidence-based measure based on school mobility, median household income in school neighbourhoods, the number of lone-parent families in the school neighbourhood). **For the last five years, four out of the five AIFY schools have been in the top 10 of the most socially vulnerable schools in their Divisions. Spruce Avenue and St. Alphonsus both ranked as the most socially vulnerable school in their Division at least once.** All schools are ranked within the Edmonton Catholic School Division to determine allocations of extra funding for high risk schools. Similarly, the

WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN CANADA?

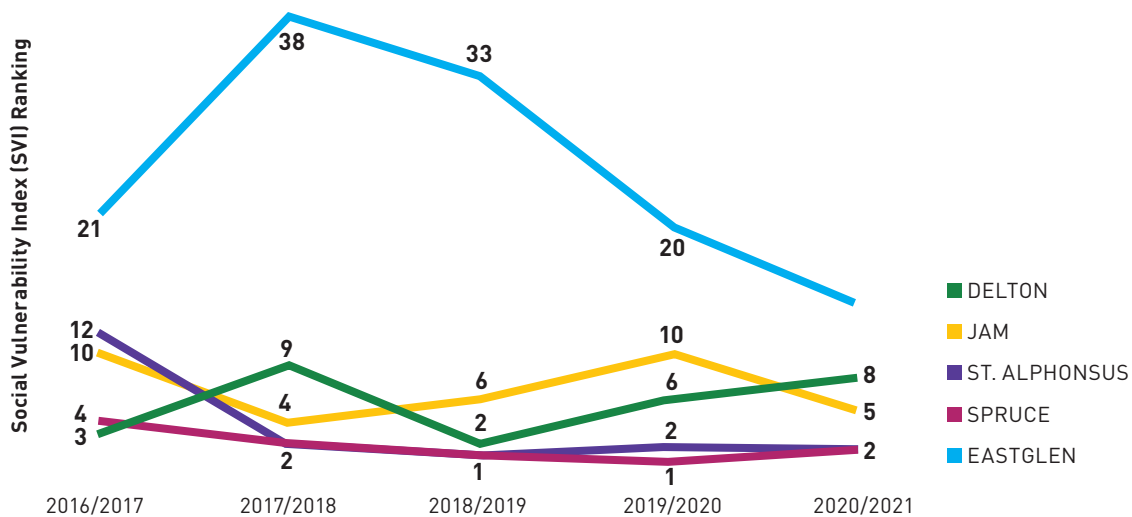
It is important to acknowledge the unique challenges and context experienced by Indigenous families during the year. It was announced in May of 2021, that the unmarked graves of at least 200 children were found at a former residential school site in Kamloops, BC (IRSHDC, 2022). This led to multiple subsequent findings of over 1,000 unmarked graves at other former residential school sites in Western Canada in June and July of 2021 (IRSHDC, 2022). These tragic findings have led to grief and calls for action (Pruden, 2021). This reflects the experience of intergenerational trauma that can burden Indigenous survivors, families, children, and youth and affect health and wellbeing (Hackett, et al., 2016).

IN THE LIT:

Single parenthood is a risk factor for social vulnerability (MHCC, 2021). According to MHCC (2021), rates of unemployment and financial insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic are particularly high among single mothers.

Edmonton Public School Division also applies the ranking formula to all schools, with the top 60 receiving additional funding allocation.

HIGH SOCIAL VULNERABILITY RANKINGS: 5 YEAR TREND FOR AIFY SCHOOLS



Although Eastglen high school tends to be ranked as a less socially vulnerable AIFY school compared to the others, it has seen its social vulnerability ranking notably decline over the last three years which unfortunately means this school community became more socially vulnerable. Moreover, compared to other high schools in the Edmonton Public School Division, it is always the first or second most socially vulnerable high school each year.

The Mental Health of AIFY School Communities

Data from the AIFY mental health therapists who support the five AIFY schools, showed that the top five themes among clients who had short-term engagements with therapists were:

- Behaviour Concerns
- Family Conflicts
- Peer Relationships
- Family Relationships
- Mental Health Concerns

It's important to be aware of the various mental health concerns AIFY students and families are trying to address and cope with within their lives. From depression and anxiety to domestic violence and addiction issues, there are diverse complexities related to students' and families' mental health within the AIFY school communities. Students who received mental health supports from AIFY reported:

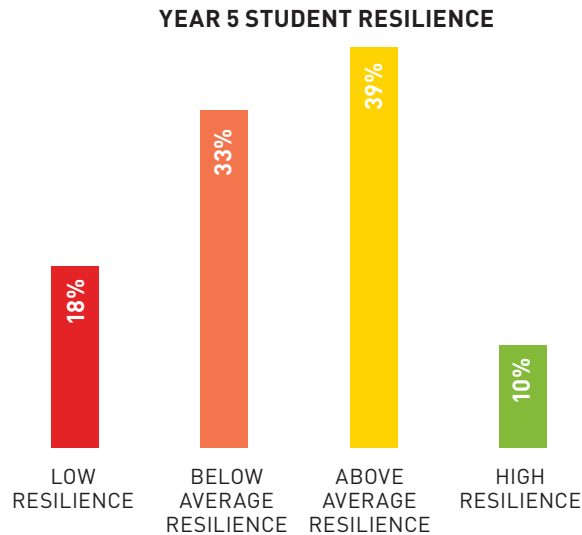
- Feeling more comfortable in their school and feeling ready to learn because of the support received from the group facilitators
- Learning healthy coping skills in groups
- Learning cultural awareness skills
- Learning and developing positive identity through participation

IN THE LIT:

Cost, et al. (2021) surveyed Canadian parents of children and youth (N = 1013) and youth respondents (N = 374) during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that more than two thirds of children and youth experienced worsened mental health (such as depression, irritability, attention, hyperactivity, and obsessions and compulsions) related to stress and social isolation from the pandemic (Cost, et al., 2021). Some outcomes were worse for children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder or previous mental or neurodevelopmental concerns (Cost, et al., 2021).

Student Resilience

Student resiliency data gathered from Grade 4 to 12 students in the AIFY school communities demonstrates some of the strengths in these school communities. Student resilience surveys are administered in each AIFY school every year (Y5: Late Fall/Early Winter), to get a sense of how resilient students are at the start of a school year. Based on the 2020 Fall-Winter student survey (n = 528 students surveyed), 49% of Grade 4 to 12 students in the AIFY school reported 'High' or 'Above Average' levels of resilience. 51% of AIFY students reported 'Below Average' or 'Low' levels of resilience. These percentages are snapshots of students' resilience at a certain point in the 2020-2021 school year, and should not be compared to previous years' data.



The 2020-2021 school year started with many changes in the ways teaching and learning were happening because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Societies were six months into the pandemic and beginning to realize the school year would look very different. Many comments made by parents during telephone interviews emphasized how the pandemic increased students' exposure to significant adversity during the 2020-2021 school year:

"It's been a really difficult year all the way around, and most of it comes down to COVID." (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

"And I can say after last year, I think the whole thing was just a disaster. The school is there to get these kids motivated and they were sitting in front of the computer [with online learning at home]." (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

Nevertheless, understanding students' resilience at the start of the school year continued to be something that helped AIFY schools and agencies to identify groups of students who needed additional supports coping with and overcoming challenges they were experiencing in their lives amid the pandemic. In light of this, the AIFY initiative continues to be committed to tracking and supporting the resilience of students because AIFY schools and agencies know the more resilient students are, the more likely they will be to achieve success in their lives and thrive.

NOTE:

Resilience definition from Michael Ungar: "In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is our capacity, individually and in groups, to navigate our way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain our wellbeing, as well as our capacity individually and in groups to negotiate for these resources to be provided in meaningful ways."

IN THE LIT:

A study with parents in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic investigated parent-related stress and incidence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; domestic violence, child abuse, neglect). For parents that reported a lifetime occurrence of ACEs, the highest reported were children witnessing domestic violence and verbal emotional abuse against children, and the occurrence increased by 34.8% during the pandemic. Pandemic-related stress was associated with increased incidence of ACEs (Calvano et al., 2021). Although the authors did not look at long-term health outcomes associated with experiencing ACEs, they did note that parents who performed ACEs were more likely to have reported experiencing violence in their past which suggests that experiencing ACEs has potential detrimental effects for later interpersonal relationships.

The Continued Impact of COVID-19 on School Communities

The 2019-2020 school year included 3 months of schools being closed to in-person learning. The closures were unexpected and unprecedented, and by September 2020, when Year 5 of AIFY started, it was evident that the pandemic and its consequences would continue to shape school communities. One stakeholder put this very well in a description of what changed between March – June 2020 and the school year that started in September 2020:

“I would say like the quarter four of the first half of the pandemic, I’ll call it, I feel like we spent a lot of time just trying to figure out how we were going to just band-aid everything. [...] So it was just more like all hands on deck, let’s just do this, we’re going to – it was a temporary solution. And then come July and August when it was the conversation started around OK, this is what September’s probably going to look like [...] and then I think there was the acceptance phase where it was like we’re into August and we need to start accepting the fact that our reality for September to June [2020–2021] is not going to be what we’re familiar with.” (AIFY Agency Staff in an Interview)

The activities for AIFY Year 5 evaluation continued as planned; however, it was more challenging to engage families/caregivers as participants because they were not entering the school buildings due to public health restrictions. This meant that there was a significant decrease in in-person contact with teachers and school staff, resulting in engagement and communication challenges.

The results presented below are based on a family survey sent out to parents/caregivers in the AIFY school communities in May – July 2021. Parents/caregivers who participated in telephone interviews were invited to complete the survey in which they reported on the impact that AIFY supports have had on their lives and their families’ lives. Participation in the family survey was voluntary following each interview.

A total of 21 parents/caregivers responded to the family survey questions. The low number of respondents for the survey and various individual questions (some with only 4 responses) due to pandemic related challenges made it hard for us to draw any conclusions from the parent/caregiver survey as we could not infer from the experiences and feelings of those who did not answer the questions. For this reason, the qualitative data collected for Year 5 has been invaluable in helping us understand AIFY impacts and contextual factors for the 2020-2021 school year.

Qualitative data collected through focus groups and interviews with AIFY school staff and agency staff made it evident that students and families were experiencing various adverse circumstances and additional challenges due to the pandemic. Overall, the biggest concerns these stakeholders had for their students and families were:

- Academic engagement
- Family stress due to financial instability
- Homelessness
- Food insecurity
- Social isolation
- Physical and mental health

“Fast forward to September, some of the families had to just adjust and were home, many of the families had lost their jobs. Or, you know, they made the tough decision where one parent stayed home and maybe the other parent maintained their employment, which then brought their family income way down. And so all of these things just continued to perpetuate that cycle of, you know, mental stress, mental fatigue, kids not getting the proper nutrition, kids not having what they used to have.” (AIFY Agency Staff in an Interview)

IN THE LIT:

Bignardi et al. (2020) found a significant increase in children’s depression symptoms during the lockdown (medium-to-large effect) regardless of age, gender and sociodemographic status.

AIFY School Cultures

In Year 5, 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. The culture of AIFY schools was strengthened throughout the pandemic, and was able to effectively respond to the emerging needs of students and families. **Here we describe how collaborative practices were used to support students and families and how they contributed to positive shifts in the AIFY school cultures.**

Family and Student Perspectives. In Year 5, parents/caregivers from the AIFY school communities reported that they believed the people who work in the AIFY schools have several important qualities; and these people have had a positive impact on their families as a whole. They reported that people who work in the school:

- Care about the well-being of the children and families in the school
- Are respectful
- Are sensitive to families' needs
- Have contributed to the well-being of the families

“She [AIFY agency staff] has been invaluable to me particularly in the way she’s been counseling me.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“When I started talking with [AIFY Agency Staff Name], it gave me a place, a safe place to be able to talk about things going on in my family, going on in my life, so I could finally start the healing process...” (High School Student in a Focus Group)

In the student resilience 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 5, 79% student respondents (n=384) reported there were positive caring role models in their schools, and 92%, (n=468) reported they had an adult in the school they could go to for help with a problem.

Trauma-Informed Schools. AIFY continues to work in alignment with the values and professional development efforts of the partnering school divisions. This also means supporting schools in their efforts to become more trauma-informed. As an example, agency stakeholders described how suspending students has become increasingly rare in AIFY schools because over the years school staff have a more holistic understanding of the complexities families are facing. Moreover, school staff work collaboratively with AIFY agency staff to identify and use tools that can address students' and families' needs.

“And now principals are doing more trauma-informed care because we’re building capacity in terms of having a much stronger understanding of brain development and much stronger understanding of how [the] outcome might affect brain development.” (AIFY Agency Staff)

AIFY Students' Academic Present & Future

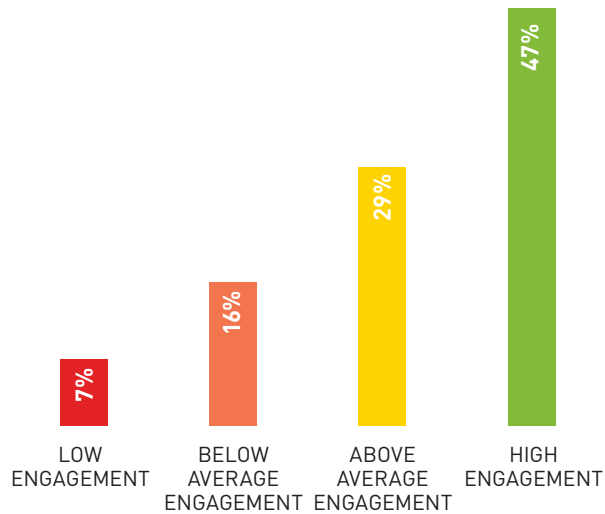
AIFY students' perceived academic engagement. On the resiliency survey, completed by Grade 4 – 12 students, they were asked questions about their engagement related to different aspects of their schooling (e.g., student connectedness, connections to teachers). A set of these questions asked students about how they valued 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 5, the AIFY students surveyed across the five schools (n = 506), demonstrated high levels of academic engagement. Over 75% of the students surveyed had 'Above Average' or 'High Levels' of perceived Academic Engagement.

IN THE LIT:

Bowden et al. (2020) noted in their paper that school staff who work in schools with wraparound model of supports reported having a deeper understanding of students' needs and issues. In the AIFY initiative, the wraparound model of support is positively corroborating with schools' efforts to be more trauma-informed.



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT Y5 (OVERALL): ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT



The level of academic engagement in Year 5 ought to be highlighted as an overall positive outcome for the past year in light of the “back and forth” between in-person and online learning, and the additional complexities experienced by students and families. As such, this result is not only a positive one but also an indicator of the hard work that both the AIFY agency and school staff put in place to support the needs of students whether they were learning at school or from home.

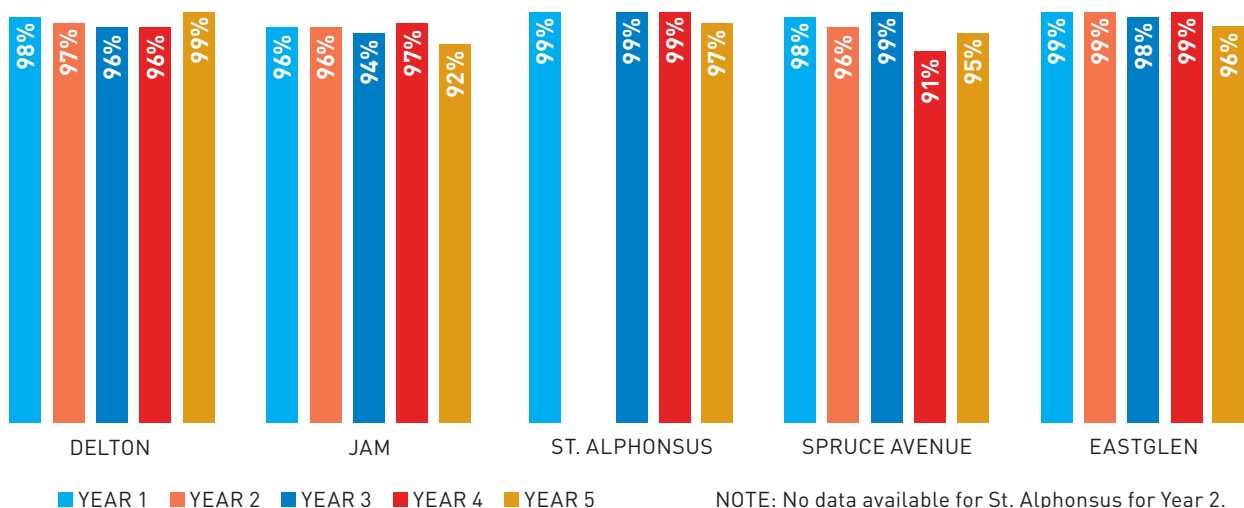
The goal of completing high school. One significant strength that has persisted across the years and observed in the resiliency survey completed by AIFY students (Grade 4 – 12 students) is the intention to complete high school. For the last five years, AIFY students who completed this survey have been 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 5 in particular, across the five AIFY schools of those who answered whether they planned to complete high school (n=502), 96% said ‘yes.’

The following graph shows students’ intention to complete high school in the past five years for each AIFY school surveyed.

IN THE LIT:

Students come to schools with diverse needs and strengths, and their learning is shaped by their physical and emotional health, family support and social emotional development (Bowden et al., 2020).

STUDENT INTENTION TO COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL: 5 YEAR TREND



Although the majority of AIFY students continue to intend to complete high school, we did observe that at three AIFY schools, including the only AIFY high school, the proportion of students who intended to complete high school dropped compared to Year 4.

Students and Families Find Silver Linings. During Year 5 of AIFY, many of the students and families in the AIFY school communities saw their schools as a source of support. In the family survey, 62% of parents/caregivers (n=13) “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement that “my child is able to access the supports that they need”. Students also noted that because they had to stay within their school cohorts for classes and recess, they experienced less physical and verbal conflicts between students on the school grounds during the 2020-2021 school year. This was described as a positive aspect of the circumstances created by the pandemic.

Moreover, students and parents described finding opportunities and silver linings during the pandemic. Some students, for instance, described how they benefited from having more contact with their family members, and how these relationships helped them:

“When we were online on the computer, I wouldn’t really have the motivation to get up. But then my dad talked to me [...] he basically supported me and motivated me to get up.” (Junior High Student in a Focus Group)

“You know, just staying closer with my family...that’s been nice, like having a bit more downtime.” (AIFY alumni in an Interview)

“My sister, she’s helped me a lot because she gave me a home to live in and, if she didn’t give me a home, I think I’d have ended up in a group home.”
(High School Student in a Focus Group)

IN THE LIT:

Rogers and colleagues (2021) surveyed youth (N = 407) and found that approximately a quarter of respondents (N = 91) indicated that spending more time with their family was a positive change with the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, an overall increase in family support was reported (Rogers, et al., 2021).



AIFY:
Year 5
IMPACTS

AIFY: Year 5 IMPACTS

The 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 (3 to 5 years), and Long-term (6 – 10 years). The logic model helps to identify and track impacts of the AIFY work across the years, and these are also organized by the 5 outcome areas present in 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 5 (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, for Year 5 we observed how the pandemic shaped evaluation data collection and impacted mid-term outcomes. As such, throughout the Year 5 impacts section, we will note instances where the number of survey respondents and/or obtained results might have been impacted by the pandemic.

Outcomes are illustrated through quantitative data (stakeholder survey data, secondary data from AIFY partners) and qualitative data (interviews/focus groups with AIFY stakeholders). Data presented in this report are considered examples of the occurrence of an expected impact/outcome but are 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



✓ School Staff feel more support in schools

School staff worked hard in the 2020-2021 year to adapt and respond to various situations imposed by COVID-19. It was a demanding year, and one where the coordination and cooperation between school and agency staff was invaluable when supporting the complex needs of students.

“But we really can’t state enough just the impact that AIFY makes for our kids, for our families, for our staff, for the greater community knowing that we’re setting kids up for success beyond high school in so many ways, and setting them up to be mentally healthy and have those strategies and resources. I think you get the picture today that we all just can’t say it enough what the difference that it [AIFY] makes for our families, staff and community.”

(School Administrator in a Focus Group)

“It’s amazing to see how a student or a family can turn around in a year with those [AIFY] supports. It takes a village and that’s exactly what is demonstrated here during this year [2020-2021].” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

✓ School staff are able to focus on teaching and learning in schools

“I think it’s really helpful, it [AIFY] frees up time for teachers to focus on their teaching and focus on your full class, still caring very much about their kid, knowing that they’re getting the best possible support they can get.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

“From my perspective, I think that the teachers do feel quite supported. They know that they can come to the admin if they have a concern about a student, and they know that there is someone in our building that might be able to help.” (School Administrator in a Focus Group)

“So 100% would agree that having the supports in house not only frees up the teacher, but it also puts the expertise on the experts, and makes the streamlining of supports and services efficient.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

IN THE LIT:

Wraparound models of support, such as AIFY, continue to demonstrate their effectiveness and ability to adapt as needed in face of significant changes to our environments. For example, Pollack, Theodorakakis, and Walsh (2021) found that schools with established wraparound supports pre-pandemic (also known as integrated student supports) were able to leverage their existing processes and relationships to maintain thorough and comprehensive levels of support for children and families in these school communities.

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

“Just being part of the team, they [AIFY agency staff] have been able to kind of come to school staff meetings and be with our staff. And we’ve done some work collaboratively on just kind of building what support looks like within our school.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

During dyadic interviews* and focus groups with agency staff, they discussed how school huddles have enabled relationship building and collaborations between schools and agencies. This, in turn, has facilitated the discussion of how students and families will be approached and supported in a way that empowers them, building more capacity for trauma-informed practices in schools.

“So we can bring everyone out of their silo and to truly do collaborative services.”

(Agency Staff in a Dyadic Interview)

“We just exist as something that teachers now see as a resource. So I think in non-AIFY schools, a lot of teachers would just try to solve problems themselves. But in these cases [AIFY], we have additional resources, and having huddles means that they [teachers] can put forward kids who maybe they feel like they need further support.” (Agency staff in a Focus Group)

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

“I’m very proud that a lot of our schools now are, I can confidently say, a lot more trauma-informed than they were before [...] You can hear it in the way the school administration describes families...” (Agency Staff in a Dyadic Interview)

The work of AIFY agency staff has happened in parallel with school divisions’ work to foster school communities’ knowledge of resilience (under the guidance of Dr. Michael Ungar who researches social and psychological resilience). As school staff and administrators have become increasingly aware of students’ resilience, they have sought and used more trauma-informed practices when working with students and families.

*In dyadic interviews, the interviewer asks the same questions to two participants/ interviewees who collaborate in answering them. The answer of one interviewee might build on or contrast with what the other interviewee said. This is a unique aspect of dyadic interviews that make them an interesting and rich method of data collection.

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.



When the 2020-2021 school year began, the reality imposed by the pandemic had set in across school communities in Canada and worldwide. In that context, schools in Alberta were closed to parents, caregivers and volunteers to slow the community spread of the COVID-19 virus.

As such, AIFY schools and agencies adapted their services to support students' families, whenever necessary, outside of the school setting. This was done through online meetings, telephone check-ins, as well as in-home visits. The mid-term outcomes observed for **Family Support** in Year 5 reflect the circumstances parents and caregivers were living with the evolving situation amid the pandemic, and the different means of support used by AIFY agency staff.

✓ Decreased feelings of isolation among caregivers

"I don't know if you've heard about this but they went around to a lot of the homes with signs and stuff, 'we miss you' and things like this, you know. It was great." (Parent in Telephone Interview)

"They [from AIFY] contact us all the time. They set up appointments for us, they set my daughter up for counseling every month." (Parent in Telephone Interview)

✓ Improved parental capacity (e.g., more confidence, improved parenting skills and abilities)

"For me, getting a better understanding of what was going on...I've never raised teenagers before. Having them [AIFY supports] made everything a lot easier." (Parent in Telephone Interview)

Parents and caregivers commonly described that by interacting with AIFY workers, they learned new ways to advocate for their children by seeking additional supports where they could get them. This was particularly relevant for families with children with special needs.

"[AIFY staff] worked most closely with me, and has helped me advocate for an assessment for my daughter because she needs that done so that we can pursue an avenue of supports for her outside of the school." (Parent in Telephone Interview)

✓ Improvements to family mental health

Formal Clients (students and families) of the mental health therapists are defined as having long-term therapeutic intervention wherein there are regular sessions scheduled between client and therapist for 6 - 10 months to work on specific goals or emergent goals. In the AIFY schools formal clients 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%. Across the 5 AIFY schools, the Treatment Impact for the Mental Health Therapists was 64%.

✓ Improved family relationships

Four parents/caregivers indicated they felt their relationship with their children has improved (they made up 100% of responses in the parent/family survey)

"I think that our relationship [mother-daughters] is just getting stronger [...] as a result of them having a sounding board and someone outside of our family unit that they can talk to, and voice their concerns and their worries, and their, you know, happy moments." (Parent in Telephone Interview)

IN THE LIT:

Pandemic-related lockdowns increased at-home childcare responsibilities, which have been disproportionately burdened by women (Leclerc, 2020). For example, according to data from the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, 64% of mothers reported that they performed homeschooling and helping with homework compared to 19% of fathers who reported that they performed this task (Leclerc, 2020).

✓ Increased food security

A survey conducted by e4c with 370 students and a total of 299 respondents across four AIFY schools offered this year's report some additional insights into students' thoughts about food available to them in school.

Of the 299 students who responded to the e4c survey:

91%

(n = 271) said "yes" or "sometimes" to the statement "I eat the food that is provided at school."

64%

(n = 192) said "yes" or "sometimes" to the statement "It is easier to pay attention in class after eating at school."

76%

(n = 228) said "yes" or "sometimes" to the statement "I feel better after eating the food served at school."

"Students not eating breakfast and coming to afternoon class and it's just like, 'Did you eat today?' And sometimes the student is like, 'No.' And I just know where to send them and then that will bring them back to class with a sandwich and their belly feeling better."

(School Staff in a Focus Group)

The total number of meals served throughout the 2020 – 2021 school year (AIFY Year 5) across all five AIFY schools was 136,997. This number is markedly lower than the 219,996 meals served in Year 4 because of lower student enrollment in in-person learning, and the recurrent school closures in response to public health mandates during pandemic waves. Yet, the following quote shows the importance of nutrition supports to families who opted for in-person learning:

"I think that the lunch and snack program was so hugely important during this pandemic because there's so much food insecurity right now, even maybe more so than in a normal year. So, it was really wonderful to provide those healthy snacks. And I could feel the relief on parents' faces when I got to tell them that 'in September [2020] the program will continue, don't worry'." (School Administration in a Focus Group)

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

"I know that I still have the supports through the school to help me so I don't feel so alone, you know, especially because I'm in this new community..." (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

The above quote is particularly relevant in the context of the pandemic, and the fact that parents/ caregivers could opt for online learning and stay connected to AIFY supports even though they might have moved to a new community outside the school catchment area.

"I just can't say enough about the kids having access to that kind of support [from AIFY] readily available to them. With COVID and everything that has been going on even more so, everyone's a little bit rattled." (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

In contrast, a school administrator from a non-AIFY school explained what usually happens – despite their best efforts – when wraparound supports are not available to students' families:

"So then I spend a lot of time with parents, I would say, that takes a big part of my job, even during COVID, which I love and it's great. But I wish I had, you know, a person beside me to support what we decide. So we come up with a goal, right, and we work through it. But then I don't have that Roots and Wings worker that could support to make sure that happens. Now I'm also on the follow-up team. If there's nobody to support that parent, most of the time, the meeting was great, but that's where it ends." (School Administrator from a non-AIFY school)

IN THE LIT:

Since July 2020, the number of Emergency Department visits that are mental-health related (e.g., due to eating disorders, depression, and anxiety) increased in proportion to all emergency department visits to a paediatric hospital in Montréal, Canada (Chadi et al., 2021).

✔ Families' needs are met (e.g., basic needs, financial)

38%

(n=13) of parents/caregivers said that when they need help, they see the school as a source of support

62%

(n=13) of parents/caregivers said that when my child needs help, I see the school as a source of support for them"

64%

(n = 11) of parents/caregivers said the people who work in the school take the time to get to know me

In response to the question of what had changed in the family's life as a result of school wraparound supports, one parent said:

"We definitely were able to stay away from being really dire straight homeless. We were able to deal with a lot..." (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

Another parent made the following comment about how AIFY schools stepped in to help families' needs:

"You know they always had something there to help those children and those families to make ends meet." (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

IN THE LIT:

Multiple recent studies have demonstrated that parents' mental health and wellbeing has declined during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gassman Pines, et al., 2020; MHCC, 2021; Thomson, et al., 2021). This is associated with stress from financial challenges, diminished access to social support, and increased caregiving burdens with children staying at home (Gassman Pines, et al., 2020; MHCC, 2021; Thomson, et al., 2021). This is concerning because, "...parental stress can undermine children's and parents' mental health and resilience and diminish parents' ability to care for themselves or be attentive to their children" (MHCC, 2021).

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.



✓ Students have the intention to complete high school

- 96% (n = 502) of students in grades 4 to 12 said they plan to complete high school on the Year 5 resiliency survey (Same as Year 4)

✓ Improved attendance

Overall, school attendance was commonly described as something negatively impacted by COVID-19. The “back and forth” between online and offline (i.e., in-person) was stressful for both students and parents/caregivers.

“It’s been kind of stressful doing the switch to online, offline, online, offline. And even then online it was kind of hard because I would be behind with every assignment. I would always be at home but didn’t really have the motivation to get up and actually do school so that was kind of hard.” (Junior High Student in a Focus Group)

Despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic, AIFY supports continued to be delivered to students in an effort to support them academically and emotionally during the school year.

“We have a large proportion of our kids now [2020–2021] that are online learning, families that are dealing with some employment challenges, and there’s a lot of issues outside of our building that seem to be out of our control. And All In For Youth provides us with a bit of arm, I think, to get out there and provide support in a way we can to ensure that those kids can come to school. And then when they’re here, we can do the work we want to do.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

✓ Successful school transitions for students

89%

of Grade 6 students (n = 121) at the AIFY schools successfully transitioned to Grade 7 within their respective school Divisions (Up 3% from Y4).

84%

of Grade 9 students (n = 153) at the AIFY schools successfully transitioned to Grade 10 within their respective school Divisions (Up 9% from Y4).

Note: The remaining 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.

“My kids are in Grade 6, and All In For Youth has been really great with supporting the kids transitioning into junior high.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

✓ Improved student mental health

“Attendance for this whole online–offline thing, we found that stressful on, you know, my daughter. I know she wasn’t really motivated to do the online thing so it was a struggle for her. [...] If she struggled, we were always willing to help her. But I don’t know if she would have been open if she hadn’t had success coaching. I didn’t see an improvement academically but emotionally because of the six months of coaching, I’ve seen improvement.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“I probably wouldn’t be where I am today. I would be where I am emotionally, mentally because things were pretty bad when I moved to Edmonton...” (High School Student in a Focus Group)

NOTE:

This year’s attendance data need to be interpreted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout 2020–2021, students attendance data might not have been affected by transitions between in-person and online when students were a close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or mandated school closures happened.

✔ Improved student behavior

“She improved compared to how she was at the beginning [of the school year]. I think she improved a lot overall. She’s a little more calm, she’s a lot more calm. She doesn’t get so hard on herself. She’s able to get back to trying.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

✔ Decreased risky behaviour

“They’re [AIFY supports] trying to keep the bullying down, they do before or after school programs to keep the interest of children.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“And then there’s always been a question of her [daughter] understanding of personal boundaries and safety. There have been several concerns. [...] And for everyone, particularly, one worker has tried to spend time with her and address boundaries and safety and what is, you know, a positive relationship and what’s not a positive relationship.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

✔ Positive relationships maintained between students and caring adults in the school

71%

(n = 103) of students in one AIFY school reported “Completely True” or “Mostly True” to the statement “adults at their school listen to what they have to say”.

65%

(n = 97) of students in one AIFY school reported having better relationships with adults in the school.

“When I started talking to the Success Coach, it gave me a place to be able to talk about the things going on in my family, going on in my life. So I could finally start the healing process and get past everything that had been causing havoc in my life, and it was really nice to have someone there to just talk about it.” (High School Student in a Focus Group)

“Sometimes kids can’t talk to a parent or don’t want to talk to a parent. So having people on the outside that they can nurture a relationship with, and talk openly and honestly is just really good for them, which makes it really good for me. I think that support (period) is so important for anyone but having it readily available in the school is just wonderful.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

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

- 62% (n = 13) of parents/caregivers said that they agree or strongly agree with the statement “My child is able to access the supports that they need”

“The lunch program helps, you know, parents’ peace of mind that their children are being given nutrition; they’re not missing out on a meal.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

✔ Improved academic performance

75%

(n = 102) of students in one AIFY school reported that they feel like they are more likely to complete high school due to AIFY staff and supports

61%

(n = 100) of students in one AIFY school reported better grades as a result of AIFY staff and supports

✔ Improved social skills

“And for me the support is exceptional, it makes a difference, it really makes a difference. It makes a difference in all our lives and how we deal with situations with one another. My daughter is more open and things like that whereas before she was very closed and kind of kept to herself” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

IN THE LIT:

Social Return On Investment (SROI) is a framework for examining the investments, outcomes and societal value of social programs, such as school wraparound programs (e.g., AIFY). SROI is rather complex because it can be hard to monetize relative small effects of programs that spillover families over the course of programs (Oosterhoff et al., 2020). The qualitative data presented here demonstrates, for example, the burden released from families when they know their children will be able to access school lunches regardless of their financial situation at home.

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.



The COVID pandemic considerably changed what was possible in terms of school community involvement during 2020-2021. In an effort to protect the health of school communities, volunteers, parents and caregivers were not allowed on school grounds, and field trips were paused for an entire school year. As a result, many AIFY activities and past partnerships were not fully utilized during Year 5. Yet, AIFY partner Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters (BGCBigS) continued offering mentoring and out-of-school supports through virtual mentoring and group programming, as well as in-person opportunities.

Mentoring (1 child: 1 adult) was offered virtually with both academic (i.e., reading, math, science) and social-emotional focuses. This approach was closely monitored by BGCBigS staff to ensure appropriate matching for students and mentors.

“We had a lot of parents who were worried about their kids from an academic perspective. And so primarily those junior high and high school students who were struggling with curriculum, we recruited and screened volunteers to do higher level tutoring with kids. And so we engaged in that with the intention that some of those matches would be short-term, [...] and the volunteer would work with the student and help tutor them through a block of math, for example.”

(Agency Staff in an Interview)

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

- 139 elementary, junior high and high school students in the AIFY schools benefited from a mentoring relationship.

Short-term mentoring engagements were introduced to junior high school students who were struggling academically. During Year 5, there were 340 short-term mentoring engagements with 55 unique students,

“I believe I have about five students that have tutors once a week and mentors as well. In my experience, this has been the best year for that with my students.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

✔ More external community partners involved in the AIFY work

BGCBigS engaged mentors from corporations for virtual mentoring sessions

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

In focus groups, students described out-of-school time as fun and a place where they could interact with AIFY staff and peers in meaningful ways.

Although out-of-school time and programs looked very different this past school year because of the pandemic, they continued to support students' and families' needs. This was evidenced by parents' comments that not only reflected the past year but also the past few years of AIFY in their children's schools.

“We do the after-school programs with the Boys and Girls Club, [...] especially with my daughter online schooling, it helps with the social aspect, it helps with seeing there's more than just school – there's the social aspect of everything.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“In the past, I had both two children attending the Boys and Girls Club twice a week. That helped me because it gave me extra time to get things done around the house or if, when I was working, it gave me time that, you know, I didn't have to have childcare so it saved me money.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

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.



For Year 5, we interviewed past and present AIFY Steering Committee members to capture their perspectives on systems change across the five demonstration schools. Additionally, questions asked about the pandemic gave us an invaluable opportunity to explore the depth of the AIFY partnership.

Unique to this year's report is the inclusion of an interview with a non-AIFY school administrator who had experience working with AIFY. Some of the perspectives from that interview were captured here as they illustrated the importance of relationships in system changes.

✓ AIFY partner relationships maintained

The AIFY partnership had already proved its strength in Year 4 when the pandemic was first declared, and the events and experiences of Year 5 consolidated that. The partners continued to provide examples of how relationships within AIFY helped schools and agencies adapt their services to the circumstances posed by the pandemic and public health mandates to better serve students and families.

“During the pandemic, one thing that really helped us was our brand as AIFY emerged. I think I'm just thinking about a couple of instances where principals said ‘this is an AIFY site’ so we are not worried about it...the confidence in the support, I saw some difference there. Because we are serving some schools where there's like this AIFY model so I can see the difference between confidence, like what will happen we don't have roots and wings what will happen...you don't have to guess, right?” (Steering Partner in an Interview)

“It is all about relationships. One of the things that I've understood best through my career is that the programs that do the best work, get the most traction, and impact systems are those that are made through relationships. And they're not quick, they're slow, it's a long term. It's almost like an embedded sort of structure that ends up happening. [...] With the same community leaders sitting at the table, it's been, you know, this is a collective piece of work that we've been talking about for a very long time. To me, that's how systems change occurs. And so I would have to say that relationship is the key ingredient.” (Steering Partner in an Interview)

✓ AIFY supports are sustained in demo schools

Most AIFY supports were considered essential services and continued running throughout the pandemic. Adaptations were made to meet the needs of families, as well as their comfort level with seeing agency staff in person or virtually.

“We view ourselves as essential services. And right from the beginning we were providing services and, in many ways, it didn't change what we provided. Sometimes it changed where we provided it.” (Steering Partner in an Interview)

“Edmonton public schools have many partners, not all agencies and organizations were able to pivot to that online context. And not all people were able to continue to walk alongside students and families during the pandemic [...]. And in this work [AIFY], nobody pressed pause, people reinvented themselves and figured out how to continue to do the work that was most critical.”

(Steering Partner in an Interview)

Nutrition supports were also maintained in AIFY schools despite public health restrictions during Year 5. This was possible through the coordination of efforts between schools and e4c. In some schools, for instance, teachers became responsible for serving meals and snacks in their classroom cohorts.

✓ Effective/efficient information sharing practices between schools and agencies maintained

When partners discussed the opportunities they observed in Year 5, many described that the challenging circumstances families faced due to the pandemic caused them to work more effectively and efficiently. The trust between schools and agencies was enhanced and became essential when

supporting students and families that were disengaged and more socially vulnerable (due to job losses, mental health issues, etc.).

“We don’t exist as individual agencies that happen to work with the same families. We exist as agencies that have relationships with each other, and those relationships connect at the ground, at the junior leadership level, a lot of middle leadership level and at the senior leadership level. So those relationships that exist throughout the organizations enabled us to reach out where we have connections and talk to our colleagues to confirm where we need to go, here’s what we have to do. Here’s the safety protocol that would have to be in place. And those connections just automatically happened. People picked up the phone and had the conversations that needed to be had. And we’re able to almost seamlessly remain in support of students and families.” (Steering Partner in an Interview)

This was also noted in school staff focus groups. Teachers and principals described the information-sharing practices between schools and agencies as a facilitator when overcoming pandemic challenges in the past year.

“And what we were able to provide with the support of our agency partners is consistency. We were able to be responsive in really creative ways. [...] One of the unexpected wins [during COVID] was the intentionality that we approached students and families in partnership with our agency partners.[...] As a result, the trust that was able to be established, for our kids to know that no matter what they were going to be OK, transferred to our families.” (School Staff in Focus Group)

Effective information sharing is also shaping how AIFY partners approach funding opportunities. Because of the well-established relationships within AIFY, partners now sit together before deciding which agency will apply for different sources of funding. This is an intentional effort to decrease duplication of work and competition between those around the table.

“One of the things we’ve been doing is on every funding opportunity that comes up, we make a decision together, and we’ll go forward as an agency or as a school board... those are all intentional decisions where we thought the best successful outcome would be possible” (Steering Partner in a Dyadic Interview)

✔ More schools implement the AIFY model of support

The impacts showcased in the previous years of AIFY were vital in the decision to expand the AIFY model of wraparound support to three additional schools within the Edmonton Public School Division. For Year 6, a total of eight schools in Edmonton will be implementing the AIFY model of support.

“Amongst the partners, we all see value in wraparound supports in school communities. AIFY as a brand clearly is associated with socially vulnerable school communities. And even when we discuss expansion, we are looking at high social vulnerability data and the demographics of Edmonton to explore where we would expand to. So I think that clarity has been helpful.” (Steering Partner in an Interview)

✔ AIFY connects to and collaborates with other initiatives that focus on student and family wellbeing

Starting in September 2021, Edmonton Public Schools launched the “Equity Achievement Project” across 41 schools. The Impact of wraparound supports including the AIFY model helped to inform the framework of the EAP. In these 41 schools, the goal is to intentionally support student learning, leading to improved academic outcomes for our most vulnerable students.

As well, EPSB expanded its partnership with Dr. Ungar to develop a long-term system-wide approach to nurturing student wellbeing. In the spring of 2021, 87 schools piloted the Youth Resilience Survey to inform the Division-wide fall implementation of the survey for all grades 4 to 12 students. Professional learning for staff and parent workshops with Dr. Ungar on the topic of resilience continue to be held to positively impact student wellbeing and learning.

“Edmonton Public is building a school culture based on the philosophy of AIFY. And we’re drawing over little pieces when we can. It’s a positive step forward; evidence of how the model was informing system change, influencing decisions around allocation of resources.” (Steering Partner in an Interview)

ECSD also launched new initiatives that align with the learnings from the AIFY model on trauma-informed instruction, mental health and wellness. The Division created the new Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (EDIAR) department, with learning modules for staff on these topics. In order to inform strategies to support students’ wellbeing, ECSD implemented a Division-wide resiliency survey with a focus on mental health. Additionally, ECSD implemented Positive Mental Health School Champions in each school with the goal of supporting and promoting the wellbeing of students and staff.

A woman and a young boy are sitting at a table, looking at a book together. The woman is on the left, and the boy is on the right. They are both looking down at the book. The background is a bookshelf filled with books. The entire image has a blue overlay.

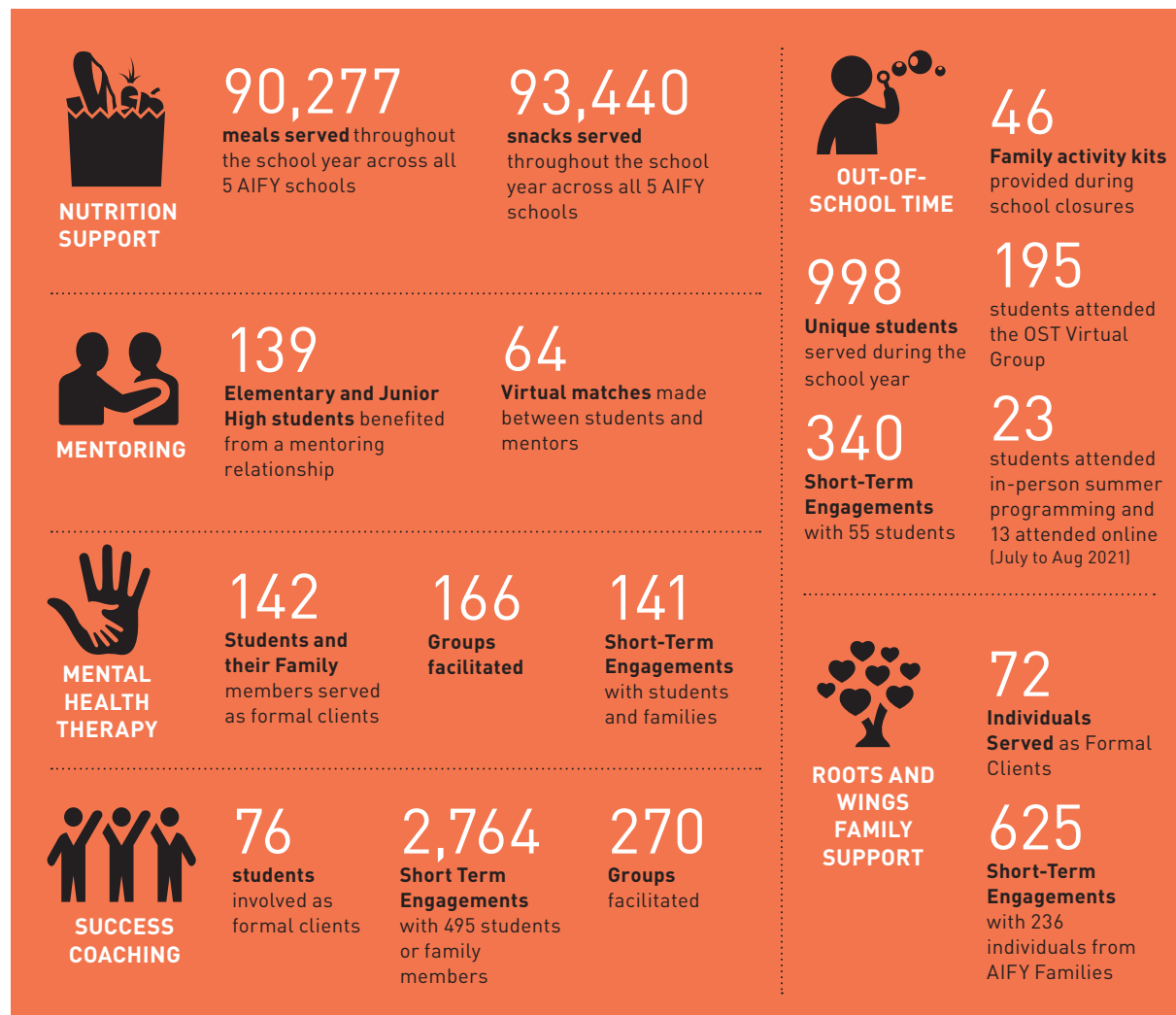
AIFY SUPPORTS:
SERVICE USE,
CAPACITY *and*
IMPORTANCE

AIFY SUPPORTS: SERVICE USE, CAPACITY *and* IMPORTANCE

In this section of the report, we have taken a closer look at what AIFY service use looked like in the school communities for Year 5 (e.g., the magnitude of service use, service use trends, the capacity of service providers). The section ends with stakeholder perspectives on the importance of the AIFY initiative.

Year 5 Service Use and Capacity

The following visual provides a snapshot of the magnitude of AIFY service use for Year 5 (the 2020/2021 school year). Year 5 is unique compared to previous years of AIFY because of the continued impact of COVID-19, and the physical closure of schools that occurred as a result of the pandemic.



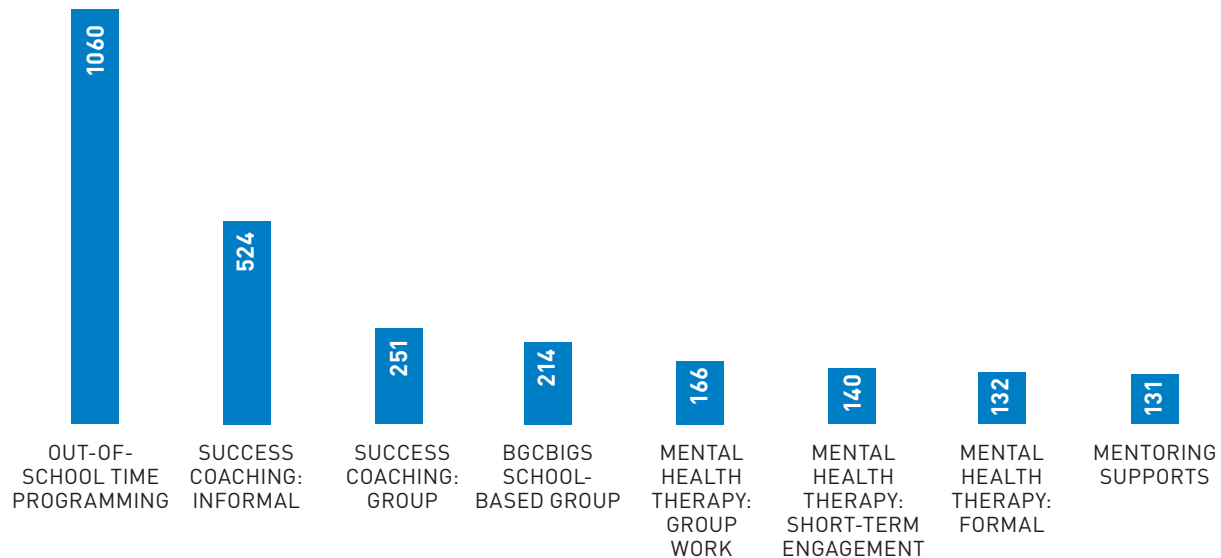
Through the evaluation, with the help of AIFY partners, we can also describe what AIFY service use looks like for students and families who were accessing one or more targeted AIFY supports across the AIFY schools. In the AIFY model of support, nutrition supports are considered universal (i.e. available to all students within the school), but mentoring, success coaching, mental health therapy, roots and wings support, and out-of-school-time are considered targeted supports.

FOR Year 5

1,403 students and their families accessed 1 or more targeted AIFY supports

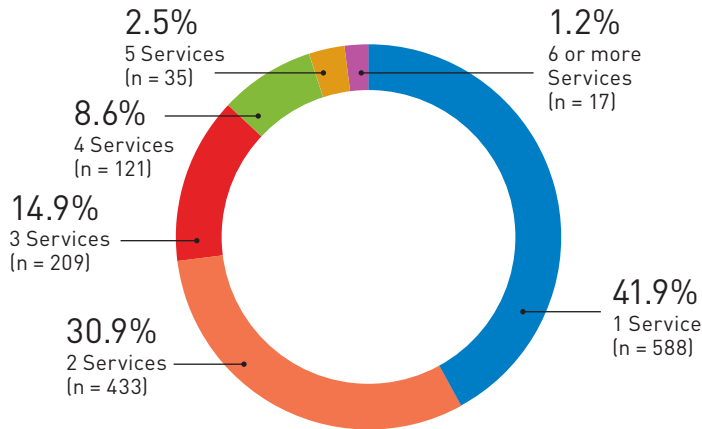
- This is 66% of the total number of students enrolled in the five AIFY schools (N = 2,112), a 4 % increase from year 4.
- 26 % were ELL Students (n=367)
- 12 % were refugee students (n=167)
- 23 % were self-identified First Nation, Métis, or Inuit students (n=324)
- 15 % were students with special needs (n=206)

Across the five AIFY schools, there were also some specific services/supports that were more commonly accessed by students. The following chart presents the most accessed AIFY services for Year 5 (accessed by 100 or more students).



Students and families may need to access multiple supports in order to have their complex needs met and to have better outcomes. In Year 5, just over 40% of AIFY cohort students accessed only 1 targeted support. The remaining AIFY cohort students accessed 2 or more targeted AIFY supports during 2020/2021, with most of these students accessing between 2 to 4 AIFY services. This demonstrates the complex needs for these students and their families in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how multiple AIFY supports can wrap around them as a result.

NUMBER OF AIFY SERVICES ACCESSED



In addition to the magnitude of the Year 5 AIFY support use, the capacity required for these supports also needs to be considered. In Year 3 and 4, the workload or capacity of the different AIFY agency staff/supports was presented to illustrate the demand for AIFY supports in the AIFY school communities. The AIFY school communities include students and families with complex needs that often require multiple, intensive supports (see pages 7-18 of this report for details about the complexity of need in the AIFY school communities).

The below presentation of agency staff workload helps to demonstrate the expected versus actual workload of AIFY agency staff to support AIFY students and families. Data in the table demonstrates whether agency staff were working below, at, or above their expected capacity. Year 2, 3, and 4 workloads expectations and capacity are also included for comparison.

	EXPECTED CASELOAD		ACTUAL CASELOAD (YEAR 2)	ACTUAL CASELOAD (YEAR 3)	ACTUAL CASELOAD (YEAR 4)	ACTUAL CASELOAD (YEAR 5)
Mental Health Therapists	20 – 25 Active Case Files representing Students and Families Served as Formal Clients (Full-Time Staff) * St. A had a 0.5 therapist from Y3-Y5	Delton =	32	44	40	24
		JAM =	22	37	40	28
		St. Alphonsus =	25	17	16	10
		Spruce Avenue =	21	55	52	37
		Eastglen =	38	64	34	33
Mentoring Facilitators	80 – 100 Children Served (Full-Time Staff) 40 – 50 Children Served (Part-Time Staff) *All schools had full-time mentoring facilitators; however, they also supported OST programs which could have impacted their caseload.	Delton =	89	56	57	20
		JAM =	63	51	52	32
		St. Alphonsus =	46	59	46	32
		Spruce Avenue =	40	51	37	28
		Eastglen =	31	38	42	27
Success Coaches	8 -10 Students Served as Formal Clients (Full-Time Staff)	Delton =	11	16	18	10
		JAM =	5	7	9	12
		St. Alphonsus =	8	10	6	10
		Spruce Avenue =	10	15	15	16
		Eastglen =	18	8	8	16

Roots and Wings Workers	10 – 13 Families Served as Formal Clients (Full-Time Staff)	Delton =	13	22	13	17
		JAM =	14	26	14	6
		St. Alphonsus =	17	11	12	14
		Spruce Avenue =	14	26	13	9
		Eastglen =	13	13	12	8

Cells highlighted in gold indicate when agency staff are working above expected capacity in the given year. For Year 5, almost half of the agency staff at a couple of the AIFY schools were working above their expected capacity. Specifically, success coaches experienced case overloads across all 5 demo schools. This speaks to the needs and level of demand for supports in certain AIFY school communities. Across interviews with parents/caregivers and focus groups with students we heard about the importance success coaches had in students’ lives in Year 5, which further validates the numbers presented in the table above.

“Just talking to her [success coach] makes me really happy...”

(High School Student in a Focus Group)

“The girls having the connection with the success coaches, I think, has helped rebuild our relationship and open up some doors that may otherwise be closed but certainly not as open as they are.” (Parent in a Telephone interview)

AIFY Service Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic

AIFY service delivery did not stop as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continued, AIFY, like many other service providers in Alberta and the nation, adapted and evolved so they could continue supporting the critical needs of students and families.

While before COVID, the AIFY model of support was designed to be collaborative, school-based, and in-person, as a result of COVID, service delivery had to change and continually adapt to public health mandates. This meant a number of implemented changes for the 2020-2021 school year to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread while remaining highly collaborative. Many of these adaptations were planned/made over the summer (2020) to ensure the students and families from each of the AIFY school communities could still access the supports they needed into the 2020/2021 school year. We will now describe the specific ways the different AIFY agency partners changed their service delivery and how students and families continued to use the AIFY supports during school closures.

e4c Supports. During Year 5, e4c consistently provided snacks and meals to students attending school in person. As an agency staff described in an interview, **“with all the disruption going on, one thing that at least would remain constant was that there was some food security for them [students].”** Meals and snacks were prepared and served by e4c staff in each school. In Year 5, e4c continued providing meals for students who were attending school in person. However, for the safety of students (who needed to stay within their cohorts), teachers started serving meals and snacks in their classrooms and stepping into a role previously filled by an e4c staff. According to e4c agency staff, some teachers commented on how the opportunity to sit and eat with students had brought them closer, and enhanced the sense of community and care within classrooms.

“Food and creating a warm and welcoming environment through the act of feeding because the teachers were the ones doing that, and they were all eating together.” (AIFY Agency Staff in an Interview)

The Family Centre Supports. In the 2020-2021 school year, the Family Centre (TFC) agency staff (Success Coaches, Mental Health Therapists, and Roots and Wings Family Support Workers) continued to focus on helping students and families navigate the pandemic. Data provided by the TFC showed the following for specific services:

- **Success Coaching.** The AIFY Success Coaches adapted quickly and, when needed, moved online to continue working with students. **In the 2020-2021 school year, there were 495 total unique short term engagements (STE) across all 5 demo schools.** STE allow for an open-door policy, ensuring that therapeutic relationships are available to support any student from the school throughout the day as situations arise. Children and youth who were enrolled in online learning for a certain period of the 2020-2021 year could work with success coaches virtually. Some students seemed more comfortable with online meetings and were able to more easily open up with their success coaches. Students who had STE with success coaches reported decreased stress levels. The average decrease in stress was 1.80 across all five AIFY schools. This is measured on a 10-point likert scale where 1 is the lowest and 10 is highest on the stress scale.
- **Roots and Wings Family Support.** The Family Centre adapted its service delivery by working to connect with children and families in-person or, when necessary, by phone or video. During huddles, school and agency staff identified students and families that were disengaged from school, as well as the most vulnerable in each of the AIFY school communities. This step was crucial in coordinating support for these families with AIFY teams. In Year 5, the most common challenges faced by Roots and Wings clients were related to difficult financial conditions, caregiver/child interactions, attachment issues and mental health issues. Overall, during year 5, Roots and Wings workers were able to offer 236 total unique STE across all five AIFY schools. Families/caregivers who had STE with Roots and Wings workers reported an average decrease in stress of 2.09 (10-point scale) across all five AIFY schools.
- **Mental Health Therapy.** During this past school year (2020-2021), the top five STE themes across the AIFY schools for mental health therapists were:
 - Behavior Concerns
 - Family Conflicts
 - Peer Relationships
 - Family Relationships
 - Mental Health

In the 5 demo schools, the mental health therapists served 135 formal clients and 165 group clients. An important layer of complexity to be acknowledged in the AIFY school communities is the mental health complexities that students and families are trying to address and cope with in their lives, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic. From depression and anxiety to domestic violence and addictions issues, there are diverse complexities related to students' and families' mental health in the AIFY communities. For the past year, the AIFY therapists used a website called "MyOutcomes" to monitor outcomes on an individual basis. From an outcomes perspective, a score of six or greater indicates a reliable clinical change, and for Year 5 the average overall change was 6.1, and 64% of clients were in the green zone after working with the therapist (whereby a client has more protective factors and less toxic stress aligning with Ungar's resilience scale).

BGCBig Supports. During the 2020-2021 school year, the BGCBig team took a dynamic approach to programming. Each site adapted the traditional Out of School Time (OST) and mentorship models in ways that fit the changing paradigms of their school. For this to happen, in late August 2020, the BGCBig Community Initiatives Manager met to review the options with AIFY schools and determine the best programming fit for each site. Within the suite of programs offered by BGCBig, engaging with children and youth during the school day became a key priority.

NOTE:

In the 2020-2021 school year, success coaches connected with students through text messaging. TFC staff had cell phones, and were able to send text messages to check in with students and/or arrange times to meet if they were not in school.



In the previous report (for Year 4), we described how one of the first adaptations BGCBiggs made to connect with the AIFY families when the pandemic first hit was a 'Wellness Call' protocol. This enabled agency staff to reach out to families and find out what their immediate needs were when schools closed from March to June 2020. BGCBiggs continued to make these wellness calls in the 2020-2021 school year (calls could take anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the situation described by students' families). In addition to Wellness Calls, BGCBiggs collaborated with the Family Centre staff, school staff, and the Foodbank, to create and deliver food/gift hampers around Christmas to 16 families at Spruce Avenue and 10 Eastglen clients.

Some of the supports families received that were facilitated by BGCBiggs were:

- Youth Employment support (30 students)
- Student High School completion support through mentoring (27 students)
- Post-secondary application support (number not specified)
- Wellness or Mental Health support (35 families)
- Food Gift Cards (40 families)
- Bus Tickets (53 distributed)
- Graduation celebration package (12 families)
- Holiday gift packages courtesy of Toy Mountain (43 families)

Throughout the year, the BGCBiggs team created over 40 activity kits to go home with participants to utilize during OST virtual programming. These kits provided families with supplies (e.g., art supplies, activities books, etc) so that students could better engage in the virtual programming.

Overall, BGCBiggs staff in the AIFY schools supported students and families with their academic and socio-emotional needs. As the pandemic situation evolved, so did the delivery, nature and reach of the supports. The one challenge identified by the agency in this ever-changing environment was staff retention. As a result, when staff shortfalls happened, BGCBiggs had to adapt quickly and partner with sites outside AIFY schools in order to offer programs consistently.

Ensuring AIFY Families Stayed Connected. AIFY school and agency partners described that in March 2020, when the pandemic first started, they invested a considerable amount of time and resources to ensure families had the devices and internet connection necessary for online schooling. When Year 5 of the initiative began in September, most families were properly set up for the type of schooling they chose (online or in-person). Nevertheless, AIFY school and agency staff continued to monitor students and families, and check in with those who were disengaging from their schools. There were instances, for example, when tutoring or mentoring from home was not viable because the technology was not available to students. Whenever the need for a computer or internet connection was identified, AIFY partners and school technology teams worked together to respond and ensure that students had what they needed to thrive in school. This included providing families with chromebooks, refurbished computers that were made available by schools, internet access, and technology support.

- United Way donated 130 Chromebooks to the AIFY schools*
- BGCBiggs loaned 8 Chromebooks to families

With an average value of \$300 each, the total value of these computers is **\$39,000!**

AIFY Service Use Trends Over Time

For Year 5 of the AIFY evaluation, we continued to explore how AIFY service use has looked over the last three years (for targeted AIFY supports), from Year 2 to Year 5. That is because since Year 2 (2017/2018 school year), each of the AIFY schools have provided targeted supports to students and their families.

Over the last five years, approximately **3,581 students** have accessed 1 or more

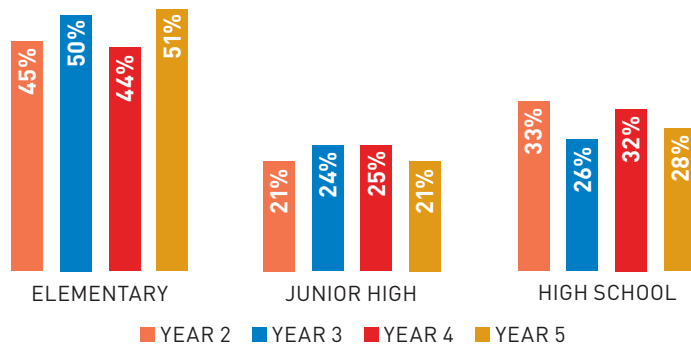


targeted AIFY support for at least one school year. Even though counts represent students, AIFY supports could have been accessed by either students and/or their family members. The following list provides a breakdown of how many students have been served in each of the AIFY schools across the last four years.

- **633** students at **Delton Elementary**
- **598** students at **John A. McDougall Elementary**
- **686** students at **St. Alphonsus Elementary and Junior High**
- **585** students at **Spruce Avenue Junior High**
- **1079** students at **Eastglen High School**

We have also been able to track the trends in grades for AIFY students accessing targeted AIFY supports from Year 2 to 5. Across the years, 44%-51% 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 5, there was a 7% increase in elementary school students accessing targeted supports.

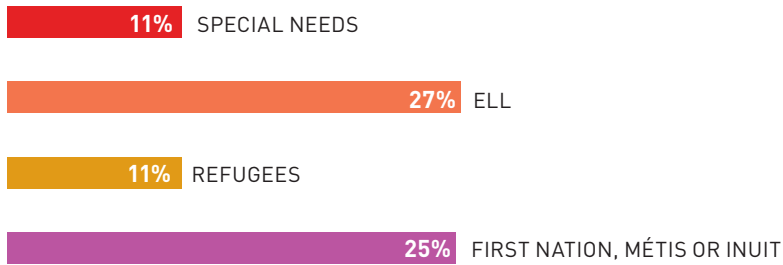
AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y5): TRENDS IN GRADES SERVED



Looking specifically at the trends in grades served in Year 5 at AIFY schools, 77% of elementary students (n=715) accessed targeted AIFY supports. Comparatively, 70% of junior high students (n=294) and 51% of high school students (n=394) accessed similar AIFY supports. These numbers capture the proportion of students accessing AIFY supports across grades in Year 5. We can see that there are high proportions of elementary and junior high students accessing targeted AIFY supports compared to high school students.

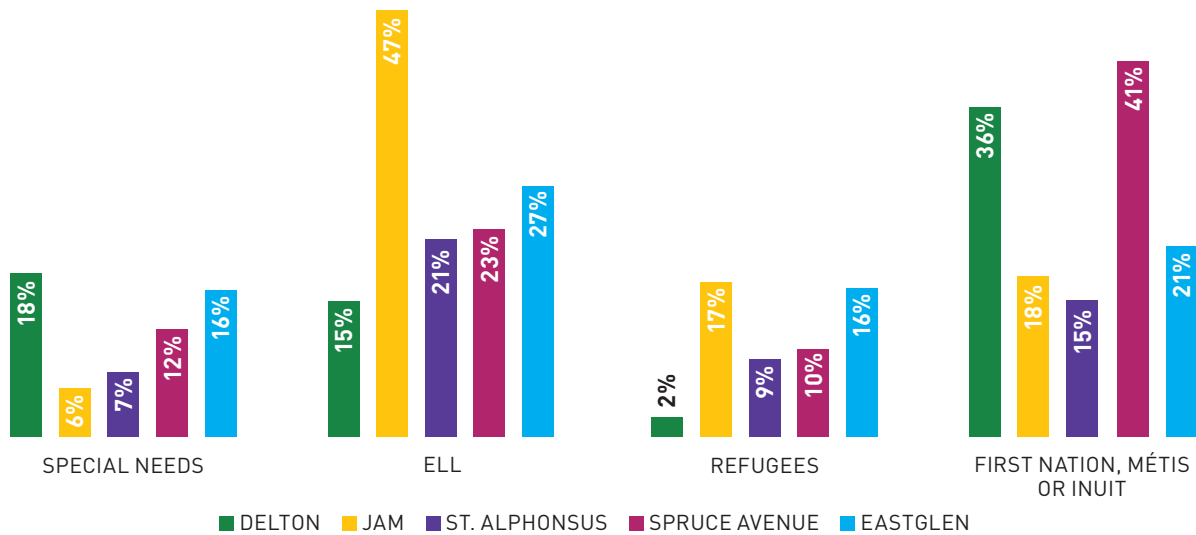
Just like the overall school demographics for the AIFY schools, the students who have accessed targeted AIFY supports for the last four years have also been very diverse. Approximately 1/3 of them have been English Language Learners at one point in the last four years, 1/4 have self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and 11% have been identified as having special needs.

AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y5): SUB-POPULATION DISTRIBUTION



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 DISTRIBUTIONS BY SCHOOL



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 = 36%; Spruce Avenue = 41%). 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.

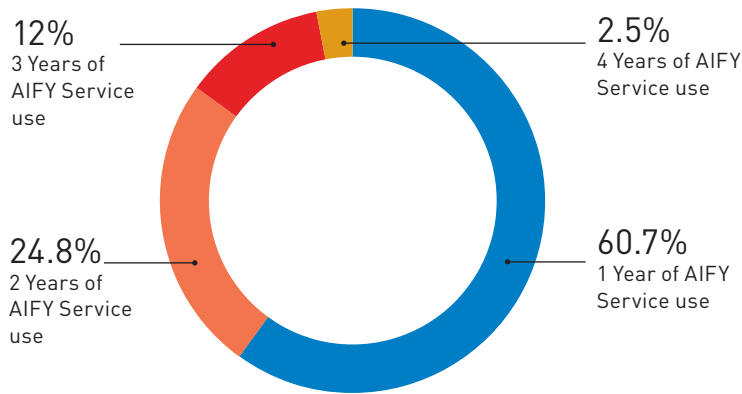
While looking exclusively within the sub-populations in the 5 AIFY schools, we saw high proportions of sub-populations accessing AIFY targeted supports in Year 5:

- 76% of refugee students (n=167)
- 70% English Language Learners (ELL) (n=367)
- 63% of students with special needs (n=206)
- 66% of FMNI students (n=324)

Accessed targeted AIFY supports in Year 5

We can also begin to see how many years of service use AIFY students have accessed over the last three years.

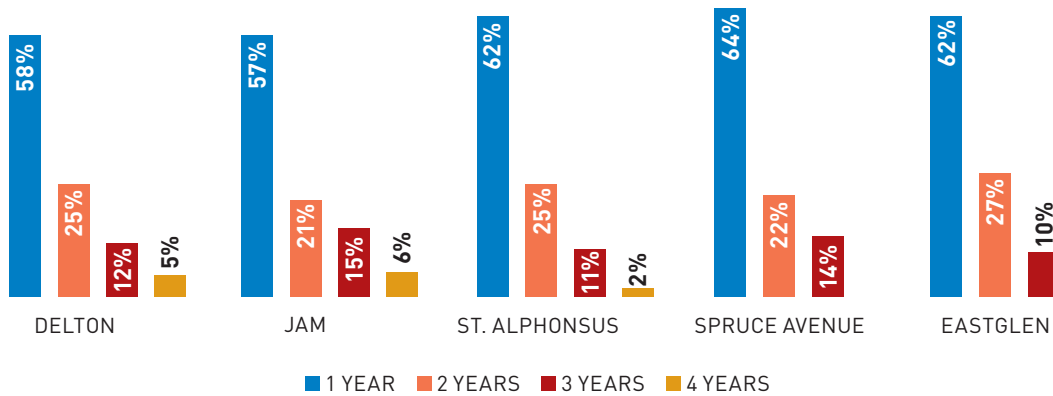
AIFY SERVICE USE (Y2-Y5): YEARS OF SERVICE USE



Overall, most of the AIFY students accessing targeted supports tend to do so for only one school year. However, 25% of students have accessed targeted AIFY services for two years, 12% accessed AIFY services over three years, and 2.5% have accessed AIFY targeted supports for the last four years.

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

YEARS OF AIFY SERVICE USE BY SCHOOL



Across the schools the years of service use trends look similar to the overall picture. These trends in years of AIFY service use may be affected by transiency and mobility of students and families that move schools. Transience disrupts continuity of service and therefore could explain why more students and their families tend to have only one year of AIFY service use.

Importance of Supports

In the 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 well-being of students and families in their communities. From Year 5 parent interviews, the following quotes speak to the importance of supports for families, but also for society as a whole.

“I think [AIFY is] amazing, especially the people that run them. For me, it was a big thing, because my kids were homeschooled until this quarter. So they were home for a year. Though they were home, they were able to participate in OST, virtually and [that] made them feel so connected to the school.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“They’re a very supportive school for the entire community, like not just the inner city community but even outside that community.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“All In For Youth is a beneficial program to any children.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

When asked why the AIFY supports are important, parents/caregivers said they are important because they build confidence and set children and youth up for success:

“They have impacted my life for the better. They really give my son much more confidence in himself that he can do what he sets his mind to. And then that comes home. And that helps me out so much.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“I think it’s important, especially with our school, because it’s so multicultural. There are a lot of families that are coming here as immigrants, so it’s good to have [AIFY] working there for them (...) whether it be counseling for their children, because they’re fleeing the war, or maybe just even connecting them to people that can help them by having translators. (...) I’m really glad that it’s accessible to all the families and they’re able to make use of it. I think it’s really cool to have OST because it gives parents a chance to not pay as much for babysitting or daycare and not have to rush right from work to pick them up. It gives them a chance to at least start supper and stuff.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“They give him the confidence that he needs (...) without those groups, I don’t know how my son would succeed.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

Families shared specific AIFY supports that were most important to them and their children for the 2020/2021 school year. They reflected on AIFY programs and reported that:

“When he talks with his mentor, he’s so happy. Every Wednesday is him and his mentor meetings and he lights up. The OST program- he can speak nothing but high praises for them. He (...) keeps to himself, but when he comes home from those programs, he tells me everything. He’s like dad do you want to know what we did? (...) I love it. Like when my son comes home and tells me stuff that he does.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“[AIFY] just blows me away. Like with girls club, you know, and it’s just sitting with the psychologist and a group of girls and everybody gets to talk about different things that are bothering them and stuff like that. I mean, what an opportunity. It’s just been great.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“They’ve had so many opportunities (...) they would have never done the cooking classes. I just can’t even begin to think of all the things that they’ve done. They would have never had that opportunity if it wasn’t for the All In For Youth programs, even the summer programs with the camps and stuff (...) it’s been great.” (Parent in a Telephone Interview)

School staff have also reported how important wraparound supports are for students, families, and school communities as a whole. Many have shared how the AIFY initiative has changed how they respond to emerging student needs. A number of



teachers and school administrators participated in group focus groups for year 5, and reported the following:

“I think that over the years, we’ve really shifted towards an approach of how we do support kids when they make mistakes. And having them here with us, they can provide some of those tools, so we’re better able to do that. And I can see that over, even the past five years that we’ve had All In For Youth, the staff kind of shifted in their beliefs, but also shifted in how we respond to kids in those situations.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

“I know that I can reach out to [AIFY staff] and see if one of them is available to take a student for a little bit just to decompress. They have helped me a lot just to feel confident that if there’s something that I don’t know, that I can reach out to them, and that my students and myself are more supported that way.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)

In the phone interviews, parents/caregivers also expressed what they thought their life would look like if the school supports were taken away or they no longer had access to them in the future. Without access to these supports, families said...

“I’d probably be more depressed than what I am right now. (...) So with that support, it gives me the confidence, (...) you know, everything’s gonna be okay. It’s just gonna be a struggle. But it will be okay.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

“It would be a lot harder, like, for instance, their music teacher. When things were normal, she offered the girls to take piano lessons and guitar lessons. So that’s how they learned to play, with the heart of the city music, and without that, I don’t think financially I’d be able to afford them. So without her reaching out to me and doing that, I don’t think they would have ever learned how to play and found that love and interest in musical instruments.”

(Parent in a Telephone Interview)

In the family survey, we also asked families if their children had to attend a new school, how important it would be for that school to have the same supports as their current AIFY school:

88% of parents/caregivers (n = 8) said that, if their child had to change school, it was very important that the new school have the same supports and services as their AIFY school.

Students, 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 the relationships that have grown from this collaborative initiative.

“I think the power of having the team be at school and part of our team has just – we can see over the five years that the students have strong relationships with the team, and the families very much advocate to the team for themselves.” (School Administrator in a Focus Group)

“I love this school. Like out of all the schools I’ve ever visited or ever been a part of, this school has kind of felt more like a home to me than any other one because these teachers and these staff around me are caring (...) they’re like a second family to me.” (Student in a Focus Group)

“Overall, I think the All In For Youth team has really shown me that there’s a really strong desire for them to help the kids succeed. And I think about the fact that it takes a village, that I think that we think about schools, schools are the village and everyone rallies around all the students and being able to talk to the All In For Youth team and just having their support and their help has made me feel like my little village of a classroom is very well supported. So thank you.” (School Staff in a Focus Group)



The AIFY
ALUMNI
JOURNEY

The AIFY ALUMNI JOURNEY

One of the desired outcomes of the AIFY initiative is that students have access to school supports that contribute to their overall wellbeing and help them build skills to achieve school success. In a focus group conducted with school staff, a school administrator summarized this goal by saying:

“We are ensuring that it’s a more rounded individual who is leaving our doors. So, right now, I’m thinking about the grads. It’s really profound but you see students in their graduation gowns, and you know their stories, and you know the work that has gone on for our whole catchment from kindergarten up to Grade 12. And you just think about the different people along the way who have supported the students in all the different capacities, and what a gift to be able to finish off their education with this sort of wraparound support AIFY offers.” (School Administrator in a Focus Group)

In this context, the mid-and long-term goals of AIFY include improved rates of high school graduation, decreased drop-out rates, and increased transition to post-secondary education or training.

Data from the AIFY demo high school indicate that 62.4% of students in Grade 12 (n=231) who received AIFY supports between 2016-2017 and 2020-2021 earned the High School credential such as a certificate or diploma. This number is lower (58.6%) for Grade 12 students who attended the same demo high school but did not receive AIFY supports.

As part of the Year 5 evaluation, AIFY alumni students (n=6) from the AIFY demo high school were invited to participate in interviews. The overall purpose of the interviews was to explore alumni students’ high school experience, and how the school supports had influenced their well-being and academic performance. The qualitative data collected through those interviews were analyzed, synthesized, and presented here as the story of Y.Y. (pronouns: them/their). **The story of Y.Y. represents a summary of all data collected with AIFY alumni.**

The main purpose was to demonstrate, through storytelling, how AIFY has changed the life of students it has supported over multiple years. Y.Y.’s journey includes details about their adverse life circumstances during high school, and how AIFY staff helped them to continue attending school, trying to keep up with their academic performance and learning, as well as dreaming and seeking possibilities for after graduating from high school.

Y.Y. is a fictional AIFY alumnus who recently graduated from high school. Their story illustrates the challenges and circumstances they faced during high school and their journey with the support of the AIFY team. Y.Y. is now a young adult whose engagement with AIFY targeted supports started during Grade 11.

The Story of Y.Y.

When Y.Y. was a 16-year-old student, they lived at home with their family. In the past 12 months, the relationship between Y.Y. and their parents had become extremely strained. Y.Y.’s parents had been laid off early in the COVID-19 pandemic, and money

IN THE LIT:

Graduating from high school generates human capital with positive outcomes for individuals and societies. High school graduates have the potential to earn significantly more over their lifetime than students who do not complete high school. Additionally, U.S. data estimate that for each high school graduate, a total of 169,000 dollars are saved across all government levels with lower expenditures on crime, health and welfare (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

was not enough to cover monthly bills. The parents started having daily arguments that were increasingly hard to cope with, and Y.Y. described moving to online learning did not help with the stressful situation they were living with at home.

“My computer at home has always been a place where I go after school, play games with friends and, you know, escape. Having to turn that [computer] into literally like a classroom was impossible for me to do.”

With Y.Y.’s family relationships being increasingly strained (and worsened with the lack of money and privacy brought about by the pandemic), Y.Y. decided to move out for good. And that was when everything got even more complicated. Y.Y. was living in an acquaintance’s basement, and working to support themselves. School became a second thought that mostly overwhelmed Y.Y., “I thought I was going to have to drop out completely.”

That was when Y.Y.’s grade coordinator at the high school approached them and thoughtfully introduced Y.Y. to the AIFY team. Y.Y. had always appreciated their high school because it was small compared to other high schools, staff were kind and there were lots of opportunities to try new things. Yet, at that moment in their life, Y.Y. needed more than that, and it was the support from AIFY that enabled Y.Y. to move through the challenges they were facing without giving up on graduating from high school.

“The success coach made a map for me of what goals I wanted to accomplish, and he even helped me to go to driver’s ed, take my test and stuff like that.”

“And I think they [AIFY team] also helped a lot with my confidence.”

AIFY mentorship and emotional support contributed to Y.Y.’s ability to continue through their studies and eventually reconnect with their family in a respectful way.

“The success coach helped me through a lot of rough patches of my life, helped me solve some issues with my family and convinced me to start doing therapy and a bunch of other stuff that really helped me and improved my life.”

When it came to their academic development, Y.Y. described that the AIFY staff gave them the freedom to try new things in different areas and subjects, and better understand what they would like to pursue as a career. The AIFY team gave Y.Y. the academic support (and push) they needed to excel in high school and eventually pursue post-secondary education, gainful employment opportunities, and many other dreams that seemed so far-fetched when everything was going wrong at home. Overall, “the AIFY team made everything possible for me.”

Moreover, both school and AIFY staff played an important role in helping them form study habits that were incredibly useful in their first year of university. Looking back, Y.Y. could see how the hard work they had been pushed to put into their academics during high school was paying off in many different ways.

With the AIFY support during high school, Y.Y. was able to feel a sense of purpose and freedom to creatively choose a future career. Y.Y.’s future opportunities and present life would have been very different had it not been for the support they received from AIFY. With much appreciation, the following quote illustrates that transformation:

“They [AIFY team] helped me to become a more stabilized adult. They helped me to essentially think for myself, they helped me to prioritize, I guess, planning ahead and thinking about what I want to do in the future as well. So more than I realized they helped every day. They showed me what I was capable of and showed me that I can succeed. If they weren’t there, I feel like I wouldn’t have gotten all of the opportunities to grow and all the opportunities to see what is out there.”

NOTE:

Positive relations maintained with caring adult mentors represent another key outcome of the AIFY initiative. The relationship between Y.Y. and the success coach at their school was described as a key support that made a positive impact in Y.Y.’s life.

IN THE LIT:

Like other models of wraparound school supports (Bowden et al., 2020), the benefits of the AIFY likely include improved intra-family relationships and increased labour productivity. These positive effects are usually not taken into account (i.e., monetized) in cost-benefit analyses of wraparound school supports. Yet, the qualitative data presented here showcase their relevance in Y.Y.’s journey.



LOOKING

forward:

OPPORTUNITIES
AMID ADVERSITIES

LOOKING *forward:*

OPPORTUNITIES AMID ADVERSITIES

Pivots. Adaptations. Changes. These were words commonly used by AIFY partners to describe Year 5 of the initiative. Although the abrupt 3-month school closure in March 2020 (Year 4 of AIFY) was in the past, the 2020-2021 school year started with its own changes and challenges. What was considered “normal” (or pre-COVID) was no longer the reality for students, families, school and agency staff. As a result, many changes in how schools functioned, and how AIFY wraparound supports were offered, had to happen.

The complex circumstances many AIFY students and families faced were undeniably exacerbated by the pandemic – with job loss, increased mental health concerns, food insecurity and social isolation.

“It just kind of magnified the challenges, the isolation was very real. We found those families and students that were falling through the cracks just disappeared. And it was really hard.” (AIFY Steering Partner in a Dyadic Interview)

However, the AIFY partners found that the strong relationships they had formed in the previous years enabled them to respond rapidly and effectively to students’ and families’ needs. **AIFY partners communicated well, increasingly trusted one another, and solidified their services and supports** amid the various roadblocks created by the pandemic. In contrast to AIFY schools, within non-AIFY schools – where the provision of additional supports relied more heavily on the school administration organization and facilitation – the situation was more challenging.

“We had a lot of principals concerned about food security for their families, we had a lot of principals who were concerned about even being connected to kids.” (AIFY Steering Partner in an Interview)

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the AIFY as a partnership has been able to consistently find innovative solutions amid adversities. AIFY partners were open to learning and prepared to help. Thus, in the spirit of better supporting students and families, an opportunity arose:

*“But at the same time, it [COVID] presented an opportunity for us to learn, now going forth, that there are some of the basic things that people need, like food and clothing, and we need to think differently about how we shore people up with these assets no matter what happens in life. **The opportunity was, everyone was prepared to help.**”* (AIFY Steering Partner in a Dyadic Interview)

The opportunity highlighted above, “everyone was prepared to help,” was repeated many times by diverse AIFY partners, as well as parents/caregivers and students who were interviewed from the AIFY school communities. While it was during Year 4, when the pandemic first started, that AIFY partners secured the donation of 496 computers to AIFY students and families and 1,220 supplementary food packages, in Year 5 (2020-2021) AIFY partners continued attentive to the basic needs of families so that students could continue to attend school (either in person or online) and thrive.

Beyond the practical responses of AIFY partners to support students and families, the **AIFY initiative emerged from Year 5 with a brand that is strong and has a clear purpose.** Students and families from socially disadvantaged school communities in Edmonton know they’re not alone in seeking and finding the supports they need to live healthier lives. Moreover, the pandemic didn’t change the goal of AIFY in helping students graduate from high school. Perhaps the biggest change brought about by the

pandemic has been in the depth and extent of wraparound supports in AIFY schools. These supports have become vital to many students and families, and simultaneously defined the AIFY brand.

“And when we work with our school principals who host the AIFY model, they don’t work in isolation, they come together in meetings, and they come together with the agency leaders. Collectively the leadership of the school principal and the agency leaders, they talk about the model, they talk about implementation so it’s a very intentional body of work [...] So when we pivoted into COVID there were already relationships that enabled our work. Our principals knew who their frontline staff were, and the agencies were already reinventing the role of the frontline staff and, and people just began to shift to be responsive.” (AIFY Steering Partner in an Interview)

Sustainability through commitment. The evidence-based AIFY wraparound model has yet to become the norm across a greater number of schools in Alberta, and funding continues to be a topic of discussion and area of work for all AIFY partners. Despite the overall recognition that funding for the future is not certain, AIFY partners firmly believe that the commitment within the partnership is the first step towards systems changes that may ensure the AIFY’s long-term sustainability.

For now, AIFY partners work together to coordinate the funds they have available for AIFY, as well as the budget allocation for the initiative. In addition, their commitment to AIFY has also meant coordinating grant applications to optimize the chances for greater funding. Whenever possible, they also nudge larger policy systems to understand how wraparound models like AIFY can support students to fulfill their full potential.

“And it’s what makes this project really powerful is that there is that commitment, a long-term commitment. This is five years now of the group going through a lot of stuff, a lot of tensions at the beginning, and a lot of like growth together...learning how to relate, learning how to connect, and really being passionate about recognizing that this is a solid model. This is the approach that is going to move the needle, that we need to work together, that we need to recognize that we each bring different strengths to this partnership. And that, together, we can have a better impact in the community and with children and with youth and with families.”

(AIFY Steering Partner in an Interview)

Another unique aspect of Year 5 discussions about AIFY funding was the recognition that the pandemic has increased society’s awareness of the vulnerability and suffering of children in socially disadvantaged communities. This has created opportunities for AIFY partners to engage with new potential funders which increased their confidence in the sustainability of AIFY.

“I attribute that to the community caring about kids and the impact that the pandemic has had on kids. And I think that when you market AIFY then you talk about what it is and that it is centered on our most vulnerable, and people are connecting the pandemic to our most vulnerable [...] they understand it. So I’m optimistic that way.” (AIFY Steering Partner in an Interview)

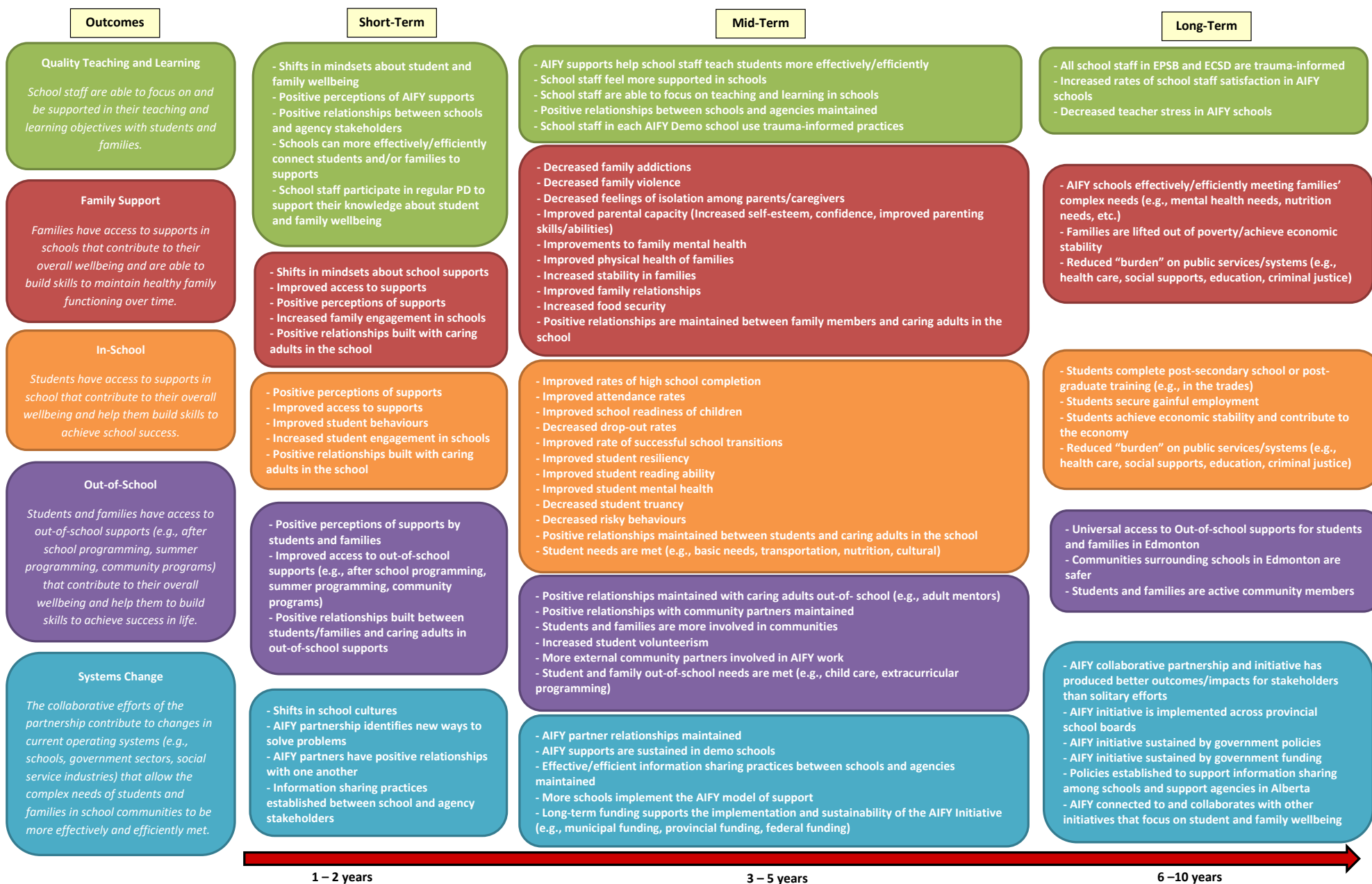
Looking deeper as we look ahead. The AIFY partnership is stronger and purposefully expanding support to an additional three Edmonton schools (and a total of eight schools) in Year 6. Parallel to the expansion, there is a “heightened awareness around the well-being of children during the pandemic” and its long-term effect on students’ and families’ wellbeing. Emerging evidence shows increased rates of depression, anxiety and emergency department visits among adolescents related to eating disorders and substance use (Bignardi et al., 2020; Chadi et al., 2021).

Within this context, for Year 6, the evaluation’s purpose is to capture the AIFY impacts across all eight AIFY school communities while better understanding the mental

health of students and families after three years of a global pandemic. We know families and communities are suffering from the realities (and consequences) of the pandemic, and it's important to examine the impact this situation has on students' and families' ability to cope with current circumstances, as well as hope for a future that includes high school graduation and more life opportunities. After all, graduating from high school is proven to generate human capital with positive outcomes for individuals and societies (Belfield & Levin, 2007)



APPENDIX



1 – 2 years

3 – 5 years

6 – 10 years



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