

Evaluation of the Quebec Community Learning Centres: An English Minority Language Initiative

Final Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

Submitted to:

Project Resource Team

Community Learning Centre

Services à la communauté anglophone et affaires autochtones
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

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Executive Summary

Background/Purpose

The Community Learning Centres (CLC) initiative is funded through the *Canada–Québec Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Language Instruction* (the “Entente”) through the Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone et des affaires autochtones (SSCAAA) of the Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). It was launched in June 2006 by SSCAAA and is part of the portfolio of responsibilities of the Assistant Deputy Minister at the SSCAAA. The CLC initiative involves providing technical assistance as well as financial and other resources to 22 English schools located throughout Québec to help them become community schools or “Community Learning Centres” (LEARN, n.d.1). The community school is an education reform model that has been receiving growing attention around the world in recent years. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between a school and the larger community (Melaville, 2000). Community schools bring together various stakeholders in partnerships for youth development, lifelong learning, community engagement, family support and community health and safety. They often combine traditional academics with other resources, such as health services, after-school programs, recreation and technology. Community schools have been shown to improve student learning and to contribute to better-functioning schools, increased family engagement with students and schools, and more vibrant communities (Coalition, 2010; Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Dryfoos, 1994). In this initiative, schools receiving a CLC grant were charged with developing partnerships with community groups to serve student/school and community needs; they also received funding for a coordinator position and for videoconference network equipment. The purpose of the initiative is to:

1. help anglophone schools secure their future in the regions in which they presently reside
2. support and monitor the development of a diversified group of Community Learning Centres that become hubs for education *and* community development in the English-speaking community and serve as models for future practice

The CLC initiative involves fifteen Phase 1 CLC sites and seven Phase 2 sites in the nine English school boards, the Littoral School Board and the Association of Jewish Day Schools. A five-member Project Resource Team (PRT) leads the initiative in collaboration with the SSCAAA. The team is composed of five professionals who carry out both distinct and overlapping roles in the initiative. They include a project manager, a community development coordinator, an evaluation coordinator, a community-based learning coordinator and a technology coordinator. In addition, the team includes a consultant who works on a part-time basis to help teachers in the CLCs use the videoconference network (VCN) as an instructional tool. The team provides technical assistance, professional development and support to CLCs based on the CLC *Framework for Action* and the needs and requests of CLC stakeholders.

The initiative is in keeping with the MELS' overall strategy for school improvement and also addresses unique issues in Québec's English-language schools, which face threats to viability from a declining anglophone population, a declining school-age population and an exodus of anglophones to other provinces and to the United States (QCGN, 2007a). The MELS strategic plan for 2009-2013 includes supporting the development of a diverse group of community schools that serve as "hubs" for English-language education and community development in their respective communities and as models for future practice.

This Executive Summary presents key successes of and ongoing challenges to implementation, progress on intended outcomes and recommendations for improvement. The Final Evaluation Report documents more fully the progress and results of the initiative to date.

METHODS

WestEd, a large education research and development agency in the U.S., was contracted by LEARN to conduct the evaluation. Earlier evaluation reports by WestEd focused on initial implementation of the CLC initiative and the support provided by the Project Resource Team (PRT) and the school boards. These reports can be found on the LEARN Quebec Web site at: http://www.learnquebec.ca/en/content/clc/clc_res_eval.html

The Final Evaluation Report employed a mixed-methods approach, bringing together qualitative data from interviews/focus groups, document review and site visits with quantitative survey data from teachers, parents, students and community partners. Data from all these sources were integrated and analyzed using an iterative analytic process. Examining data from multiple sources permitted triangulation to support or challenge findings and emerging themes.

Data Collection Method	Data Source	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Observations of PRT-led professional development and workshops for CLC staff	Observations Document review	X	X	
Focus groups	Principals, coordinators, school board representatives, teachers, parents, students	X	X	X
Initial site visits	15 Phase 1 CLCs	X		
Initial site visits	7 Phase 2 CLCs		X	
Second site visit	7 Case study sites		X	X
Partner and activity inventories	CLCs			X
CLC telephone interviews	9 Phase 1 principals 4 Phase 2 principals 9 Phase 1 coordinators 5 Phase 2 coordinators			X
SSCAA interviews	SSCAA leaders and staff	X	X	X
PRT interviews	PRT members	X	X	
Interviews with directors general	Interviews with directors general or representatives		X	

Interviews with advisory committee members	Interviews		X	
Online partner survey	Partners		X	X
Online site surveys	Teachers			
	Students			X
	Parents			
PRT document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listserv communication • Professional development materials and feedback forms • <i>Framework for Action</i> • <i>Guidebook</i> • Year-end reports 	X	X	X
Site document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-end reports (where available) • Theories of change/Action plans (where available) • Mission statements (where available) • Newsletters (where available) • Evaluation plans 	X	X	X

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This evaluation was guided by a set of formative and summative evaluation questions:

- To what extent and in what ways do the PRT and PIC¹ implement activities and processes designed to contribute to the capacity of the CLCs to achieve the short- and intermediate-term outcomes, such as developing organizational capacity, forming partnerships and developing a collaborative school culture?
- To what extent and in what ways do the CLCs, led by principals and CLC coordinators, implement their action plans, including the development of community partnerships and engagement, the development of a culture of collaboration and the use of community-based learning?
- To what extent and in what ways do the 22 CLCs accomplish the goals they set for themselves including the following:
 - ongoing collaborative partnerships between schools, families and communities
 - increased student success and engagement
 - enhanced access to educational services and lifelong learning for communities
- To what extent and in what ways do the 22 CLCs show evidence of sustainability after the project funding and support end?

¹ The PIC is the Project Implementation Committee. The PIC is led by the Assistant Deputy Minister and Director of the SSCAAA. Its members include a professional associate at SSCAAA and the members of the PRT. The committee represents the link between the initiative (including the PRT and CLCs) and the SSCAAA at MELS.

- To what extent and in what ways do the project’s *Theory of Change* and the individual CLC theories of change adequately represent the processes and outcomes of the initiative?
- What lessons does the project offer for policy and practice, particularly concerning establishment and support of CLCs in the English-speaking communities of Québec?
- What is the role of school boards and school-level committees in supporting the process of successful implementation of CLCs?
- What is the impact of the work done by the PRT and the PIC to enhance the policy environment for CLCs?

KEY FINDINGS

The complete Final Evaluation Report contains a great deal of information and a large amount of detail. In this executive summary, we seek to highlight the successes, enumerate the challenges, emphasize the lessons learned and offer our reflections and recommendations based on the evaluation questions.

Introduction

In order to frame the key findings and discussion on implementation, we provide Figure 1 below, which illustrates how the evaluators approached categorizing the CLCs according to each site’s level of implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005). (Please see the Final Evaluation Report for further explanation.) The stages, depicted in the figure below, include, in increasing order of development: exploration and adoption, installation, initial implementation, full operation, innovation and sustainability. Whereas Fixsen and colleagues refer to these stages as separate categories, we view the stages as markers along a continuum of progress, as depicted in the figure below. For example, based on the site data examined, we determined that, within a category such as initial implementation, a CLC could be at the beginning of the stage, solidly in the middle, or at high implementation (i.e. almost at full operation).

Figure 1: Stages of implementation



Becoming a true Community Learning Centre is not simply a matter of offering new activities to students and the community or developing new partnerships. It is a purposeful, planned change in school organization and a change in relationships between the school and the community through partnerships (Smith, 2007; Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). Although CLCs followed a common model, the *Framework for Action*, developed by the PRT, implementation varied across sites. CLCs found to be at the “full operation” stage of implementation were those

with more highly committed principals, effective coordinators, partnerships that benefited both the school and the partner organization, signed partnership agreements, and greater teacher buy-in, governing board and school board support than was found in other CLCs.

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KEY FINDINGS: Successes of Implementation

This section summarizes the aspects of the initiative that worked well and led to successful CLC implementation. These include roles of stakeholders such as the PRT and the use of resources and materials developed by the PRT to guide implementation; the leadership of principals and effectiveness of coordinators; the extent of partnership development; the extent and types of activities developed; and the level of governing board, steering committee and school board support.

Role of the Project Resource Team

Overall, the PRT proved invaluable to the CLC initiative. The PRT is credited by stakeholders at the CLCs and at the SSCAAA with fostering the implementation of the CLC initiative, responding to policy and practice challenges, providing high-quality professional development and building capacity at the local level to bolster the likelihood of successful implementation. Principals and coordinators reported that the PRT was always responsive when called upon for technical assistance and one-on-one support. In addition, the PRT:

- developed materials, such as the *Guidebook*, *Theory of Change* and action plans for use by CLC coordinators and principals to manage implementation and assess progress
- provided professional development sessions and time for school teams to work together
- used a balance of support and pressure and held CLCs accountable by mandating self-evaluation
- supported CLCs and teachers in using the VCN for educational purposes and in using community-based learning through theme weeks such as literacy or health. Evaluation findings suggest that this support is beginning to have an impact on teachers' use of community-based resources and curriculum enhancement through the VCN.
- succeeded in building a network/learning community among CLCs and CLC partners
- continues to represent the interests of the CLCs with MELS and has influenced the development of policies to support the CLCs

Roles of CLC Coordinators, Principals and Other Stakeholders

The roles of the principal, coordinator, teachers, steering committee and school board within the CLCs were instrumental in how each CLC evolved. A principal and coordinator fully committed to the CLC proved essential for successful implementation. The principal and coordinator sharing a vision of the CLC, communicating effectively and working together to implement an action plan are critical to the success of the CLC. Full-operation sites were more likely to have exceptional coordinator commitment and strong principal leadership. Full-operation sites also had greater teacher buy-in, stronger school board and/or governing board support, and steering committees more actively involved in planning and decision-making than other sites.

Role of Partners/Partnerships

The number and types of CLC community partnerships vary widely across the 22 sites. The most recent CLC partner surveys indicates that the current types of CLC partners include government-sponsored or government agencies or organizations (e.g. CEDEC, CSSS), community groups (e.g. Coasters' Association) universities and colleges (e.g. McGill, local CEGEP), service providers (Centre for Literacy, AMI-Quebec) and businesses. The most common types of partners reported are nonprofit organizations (42.6%).

The type and level of engagement of community partners varies across CLCs. Once established, CLC partnerships remained mostly consistent over time. Through partnerships, all CLCs offer programs and services aimed at students (e.g. homework assistance, tutoring, sports and recreational activities), and most offer programs and services aimed at parents and community members as well (e.g. family and adult yoga, martial arts classes, cooking classes, community gardens, senior activities and literacy programs).

In a 2010 partner survey, virtually all partners agreed or strongly agreed that becoming a CLC partner had benefited their organization, agreed they had a good working relationship with the CLC, and agreed that the CLC was important to the English-speaking community. Not surprisingly, the most successful partnerships benefit both the school and the partner organization.

It is important to note that several CLCs partnered with francophone as well as anglophone organizations and agencies to meet the needs of their communities. In addition:

- 80% of full-operation CLCs sites and 100% of high initial implementation CLCs have signed partnership agreements
- full-operation sites have more federal municipal and government partners than less-developed CLCs, and more partners providing cash donations

CLC Activities

All CLCs provide both ongoing and one-time activities and programs in their communities.

- All CLCs provide activities, programs and services free of charge.
- Fifteen of the eighteen CLCs with activity data information also charge a fee for some activities, programs or services.
- All CLCs offer programs and services to students (homework assistance, tutoring, sports and recreational activities), and most offer programs and services to parents and community members as well (family and adult yoga and martial arts classes, cooking classes, community garden, senior activities and literacy programs).
- Most sites offer youth development programs and academically-based activities for students, such as leadership teams; homework programs and after-school programs; and recreational activities including dance, sports, martial arts, drama and music.

KEY FINDINGS: Challenges to Implementation

Implementation challenges at the CLC level and areas for potential improvement are summarized in this section. Addressing these areas may help more CLCs become fully operational and achieve project sustainability. As is typical in large-scale, complex initiatives, some successes also proved to be challenges, depending on the circumstances within CLC sites. The challenges frequently stem from lack of clarity about roles, commitment to the CLC initiative, teacher and parent engagement in or support of the CLC, and implementation an English-language initiative in primarily French-speaking communities. Two key challenges—school board support and sustainability—are discussed in greater detail below.

PRT Expectations

- The PRT's expectations regarding completion of documents and signed partnership agreements were sometimes viewed by coordinators and principals as challenges, though these ultimately contributed to successful implementation. As well, addressing the many steps in the *Framework for Action* and the *Guidebook* was often described as complicated, cumbersome and time consuming.
- Meetings and training opportunities held in Montréal were considered valuable and usually a good use of time by attendees; however, principals found it problematic to be away from schools for two or three consecutive days.

Principal and Coordinator Roles

- A principal's role changes when a school becomes a CLC, and the additional responsibilities have proved demanding for some principals.
- Communication issues between a principal and a coordinator can stall implementation momentum.
- The coordinators' position is frequently tentative and temporary, leaving them with concerns about job security. School boards refrain from funding the position because of policies that would make it a permanent budget expense, which results in some coordinator turnover.

Partners/Partnerships

- The most common challenges noted by partners included lack of funding for projects or activities, uncertainty regarding CLC sustainability and misunderstanding of the coordinator's role.
- Partners also indicated that increased advertising or information about the CLC to the community was needed.

Stakeholder Buy-in/Commitment

- Low parental engagement was consistently identified as a challenge by coordinators.
- Teacher buy-in has been noted as a challenge in nearly every CLC.

- Involvement and responsiveness of school board representatives varied, and school board representatives tended to be more actively involved and helpful when the Director General was explicitly supportive of the CLC concept.

Location/Populations

- The dispersion of the English-speaking community over a large geographical area presents a number of challenges for some CLCs (e.g. getting adults involved and increasing student attendance in after-school or weekend programs).
- CLCs located in mostly francophone communities face the challenge of having to serve both French and English populations.
- CLCs located in urban settings face unique challenges, such as territorialism, competition and an abundance of existing services in English.

Other Challenges

- Two schools reported that becoming a CLC damaged their school's image among stakeholders, as some parents and community members interpreted the additional services for certain student populations as a sign that the school serves predominantly at-risk students.
- Early difficulties in using the VCN discouraged some teachers and staff from accessing this resource. In addition, despite efforts by the PRT to address the community-based learning approach to teaching, it has been more challenging to implement at some sites.

Challenge of School Board Support

Most school boards do not play a significant role in the day-to-day management of the CLCs, and school board staff tend to support and oversee the CLCs at an administrative level, by managing finances, providing VCN assistance and implementing strategies such as the Tell Them From Me survey. However, several CLC coordinators and principals reported low levels of school board support as a challenge to implementation. Low attendance by school board representatives at PRT training sessions for CLC staff disappointed coordinators and principals and led them to perceive this as a lack of school board support for their work.

A review of the findings concerning the role and support of the regional school boards for the CLCs in their territory shows that five CLCs received “low” board support, ten received “medium” board support and seven received “high” board support. Only two school boards openly embraced the CLC concept as an approach to education beyond a pilot project, seeing it as a way to help preserve English-language schools and communities and directly benefit students as well as communities.

Uncertainty of board commitment to the long-term sustainment of CLCs impacts the ability of CLC leadership and school board representatives to collaborate effectively. Some school board representatives and directors general expressed concern about fairness of CLC schools receiving

resources that other schools do not receive. Some school board representatives and directors general question whether CLCs directly influence student achievement.

Challenge of Sustainability

From the beginning of the CLC initiative, the PRT stressed the importance of sustainability and provided a comprehensive checklist entitled “*Steps in the Development of a Sustainable CLC*” to help CLCs in their planning. But sustainability remained a challenge for the CLCs, as all indicated they would need some help from school boards, the government and partners, especially with securing future funding to maintain the coordinator position and for activities in general. One school board has committed to providing the necessary support to sustain two original CLCs and for all schools across the board to implement or enhance CLC concept-based activities and programs. In addition:

- At the end of Year 3, nine of the twenty-two sites identified strategies for sustaining CLCs.
- Seven CLCs at full operation and two at high initial implementation are confident they will be sustainable.
- Five CLCs at full operation and three at high initial implementation believe they are sustainable, but not without some further financial support.
- Four CLCs at initial implementation report that they will require significantly more support, and one other is not considered sustainable.
- Partners reported in the 2010 year-end survey in some sites that little progress had been made toward sustainability.

KEY FINDINGS: Progress Toward Expected Outcomes

This section summarizes the overall progress made toward expected outcomes at the project, CLC, school, student and community levels.

Project-Level Implementation Goals

Over three years, the CLC initiative has made significant progress toward most of its intended short-term and intermediate goals as defined in the Theory of Change.

- CLC principals share leadership in most CLCs.
- All CLCs have developed and implemented an action plan and demonstrate organizational capacity.
- Most coordinators work effectively toward implementing their action plan.
- High levels of principal leadership are evident in six CLCs.
- High levels of coordinator leadership are evident in 16 CLCs.
- CLC services and resources are being used by community members.
- The PRT has advocated for policy change at the provincial level to support CLC sustainability.
- The PRT regularly shares evaluation reports with relevant stakeholders and uses evaluation findings to tailor its professional development and technical assistance.
- All but two CLCs have planned or conducted self-evaluations.

- Many CLCs are working with provincial, community, non-governmental as well as para-public agencies.
- All CLCs have a core group of stakeholders who actively participate in the CLC.

The full-operation CLCs have made progress on achieving the intended long-term goals of the initiative:

- Five are hubs in their communities.
- Several have included community stakeholders in the development of their action plan.

Several anticipated outcomes of the Theory of Change have not yet been fully achieved:

- Constructive relationships between school boards and all CLCs
- Formalization of CLC sustainability
- Policy alignment
- Integrating action plans into school success plans
- Partnering between teachers and community groups

The Project Implementation Committee (PIC) represents the link between the project (including the PRT and CLCs) and the SSCAAA at MELS. Committee members reportedly had good communication but met infrequently. The PIC accomplished the following over the past three years:

- Visibility for the initiative increased.
- The Assistant Deputy Minister advocated for the CLC concept with the directors general and explained funding decisions and options. The Assistant Deputy Minister was somewhat successful in garnering the support of the directors general for the initiative.
- Ten school boards recently indicated interest in having one or two new CLCs in their territories.
- The most recent MELS strategic plan lists support for the CLCs in English schools as an objective.

Progress Toward Outcomes for CLCs

Implementation of the CLC concept has changed all 22 schools involved, some more extensively than others. Despite many challenges to implementation, some progress was made toward expected outcomes at all 22 sites. Twelve schools have a well-developed CLC model, are essentially community schools, and are categorized as fully operational; five are rated at high initial implementation; and five are rated at initial implementation. According to a review of individual CLC action plans and/or theories of change, most of the CLCs identified several types of intended outcomes, including long-, medium- and short-term impacts, outcomes and outputs related to:

- Student achievement and success
- Youth development
- Quality education and lifelong learning

- Improved health
- Community development and vitality
- Increased recreational activities
- Family support

Although the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved depends on the stage of implementation of each CLC, most CLCs identified progress toward some or all of their expected outcomes. Teachers at full-operation and high initial implementation CLCs were more likely to report that their CLC enhanced student attitudes and student engagement in the classroom. Indeed, 19 out of 22 CLCs reportedly observed some form of improved academic success for students, such as increased achievement and improved behaviors that support academic success.

Progress Toward Outcomes for Students

Without an experimental design, it can be difficult to attribute changes in student behavior and academic achievement solely to the CLC, because like all schools, the CLC schools have multiple initiatives and reforms underway at the same time. Evaluators did not observe all outcomes at all sites; the list below reflects trends and perceptions that were observed by the evaluators or reported by stakeholders, including principals, coordinators, teachers, parents, partners and students in interviews and/or surveys:

- Improved or increased student engagement in school
- Increased opportunities for in-school and out-of-school recreation, activities and programs, and access to such activities in English
- Improved student health and healthy living habits
- Increased student involvement in or attachment to the community
- Opportunities for students to earn school credits through volunteer work with partner organizations
- Free use of partner facilities (e.g. skating rink) by students
- Use of school facilities by parents and grand-parents for academic and recreational pursuits
- Greater number of adult advocates for students
- Improved academics and increased academic support, including after-school homework help, resulting in students completing assignments more often and coming to class better prepared
- Increased academic support resulting in improved attendance and graduation rates, as well as improved examination scores at some CLC schools
- Increased school community investment in students' education and success

Progress Toward Outcomes for Schools

In addition to the impacts for students, CLC implementation also resulted in the following changes for schools as organizations and as institutions in communities:

- Partners have donated materials, provided both financial and human resources and increased opportunities in the schools for students, parents and other adults in the community.
- School facilities are better utilized (after-school, evenings, weekends, by partners, families, and students of the school community and neighboring communities), which enhances community vitality.
- After-school and weekend learning programs have been established and have grown considerably as a result of the CLC initiative.
- The self-evaluation process has led some schools/CLCs to assess programs and services and begin to make improvements where needed.
- Lifelong learning opportunities such as popular education classes or skill enhancement are most often provided through full-operation sites.

Progress Toward Outcomes for Communities

CLC goals include community development and support for English-speaking communities. CLCs are beginning to see outcomes and impacts for the communities in which they are located. Five CLCs have met the criteria for becoming “hubs” in their communities for education, activities and programs. All CLCs are providing activities and services in English for community members, a few are on their way to being “the” place to go in the community for information and activities in English. Full-operation CLCs collaborate with local schools and centres to expand the CLCs’ reach, increase the variety of activities and programs and provide more options to community members. Other outcomes include:

- Increased community connectedness (decreased isolation)
- Increased access to activities, information and resources in English
- New possibilities and opportunities for partner organizations to provide previously unavailable services to all community members
- Increased opportunities for partner organizations and agencies to connect with previously difficult to reach populations and more readily fulfill their mandates through partnerships with CLCs

Progress Toward Outcomes for the English-Speaking Community

In addition to outcomes for communities in general, the CLC initiative has as its goal to support English minority language communities. Some specific outcomes in this regard include:

- Networking by coordinators who volunteer on several community boards or committees has heightened awareness of the needs of the English-speaking population.
- The vast majority of teachers and staff agreed that CLCs are helping to meet the needs of their English-speaking community.
- Most teachers and staff agree that the school/CLC provides and improves access to services that were not available previously in the community.
- The vast majority of partners reported that they agree that the CLC is helping to fill gaps in available programs and services.

REFLECTIONS

This evaluation indicates that the CLC initiative has launched the majority of CLC sites beyond the initial implementation stage of community schools and has turned several of them into true hubs for the English-speaking communities they serve. All of the CLCs have begun to identify positive impacts on their students and their communities that can be deepened through further institutionalization of the CLC approach and services. Moving forward, the challenge and opportunity for the initiative is to ensure that each CLC progresses through initial implementation to full operation and beyond, to innovation and sustainability.

The feedback from CLC coordinators, principals and board representatives indicates that the PRT's work is essential to the CLCs' implementation and success, particularly its professional development sessions, the time provided at these sessions to work as school teams, the strategy planning documents and templates it designs for CLC teams, and the facilitation of communication with the school boards. The PRT has been flexible and responsive to formative feedback, and individual members were deemed instrumental by coordinators and principals in supporting implementation. According to one staff member at the SSCAAA, the PRT is an essential centralized coordinating body that is "definitely required for us to do this. I really believe we have to have them. They have done an amazing job."

Although all of the CLCs largely exhibit similar organizational structures, community partnerships and funding streams, and have for the most part completed the same implementation steps outlined in the *Framework*, some have developed further and more completely than others. A first step in moving forward will be for all stakeholders to learn from the CLCs that have become fully operational as well as from those sites that have become hubs for their English-speaking communities. There is much that principals and coordinators at these sites could share, perhaps through videoconferencing opportunities, that would likely benefit sites at lower stages of implementation. Another salient finding in both the literature on community schools and in this evaluation is that effective management and leadership, as well as shared vision and commitment from key stakeholders, such as teachers, school boards and community partners, are critical to the success of community schools. CLC sites with high levels of coordinator and principal leadership, teacher buy-in and school board support were more likely to have reached the full-operation stage of implementation. Principal leadership appeared related to teacher buy-in, though there were examples of some CLCs with strong principal leadership and low teacher buy-in.

A critical feature of CLCs as they enter the innovation stage will be continued self-evaluation of programs and practices, to ensure that intended outcomes are being attained and that the activities and services provided are effective, as well as impact measurement—a key sustainability strategy. The PRT has provided guidance to CLCs on how to conduct ongoing internal evaluation, adjust programming according to evaluation findings, measure impact and share findings with stakeholders. It is imperative that this work continue. Since many CLCs

struggled with developing theories of change, this may be a good time to review this tool, now that early impacts have been identified.

As MELS funding for the CLC initiative decreases over the next few years, it will be critical for the CLCs to engage in sustainability planning as they bring their sites into full operation. As we have seen with this ambitious pilot project, sustainability involves much more than simply obtaining additional grant funding. To become sustainable, a program must have a clear shared purpose and strong fit with the mission of the institution, strong internal systems, broad-based community support and key supporters championing the cause. In many cases, the culture of the institution must change in order for the initiative to be sustained. In addition, program activities must be evaluated regularly to determine whether they are worth sustaining, and the scale or scope of the project to be sustained must be considered. In some cases, this may mean moving forward with a reduced scope of activities. For example, a few CLC principals reported that it would be possible to sustain the CLC without a funded coordinator, but at a much reduced scale of services.

Sustainability requires the development of a financial strategy that includes identifying how much funding is needed to sustain the initiative at a given level of implementation, and identifying and systematically pursuing the necessary types of financial resources. Initiatives often pursue sustainability either through institutionalization (e.g. support from school/school board to continue all or some of former grant-funded activities) or through external support (obtaining support from outside the institution to continue some or all of the former grant activities). CLCs will likely need to pursue both sustainability strategies.

Finally, as mentioned previously, CLCs have found professional development and technical assistance to be fundamental in achieving their intended outcomes. Professional development addressing various aspects of CLC management and leadership should not only be continued, but also be expanded to include teachers and school principals. As instructional leaders, principals can play a key role in influencing the instructional approach of teachers in their schools; and the extent to which principals are knowledgeable and supportive of community-based learning will be reflected in the extent of teacher buy-in and practice of this approach. Inviting teachers to participate in CLC professional development opportunities that are relevant to their practice would likely lead to higher levels of teacher commitment to the CLC concept. The PRT will need to explore ways to include principals and teachers without taking them away from schools for long periods of time – perhaps by using the VCN technology to reach constituents across sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for the PRT, the SSCAA and the CLCs are described in the sections below. These recommendations contain common threads that should be highlighted as key elements to be considered for continued progress and success. These include:

- Having the CLCs, their school boards, partners and other stakeholders focus on sustainability

- Building school board support and clarifying the roles and actions needed at the board level to support implementation at the local CLC level
- Developing broader stakeholder buy-in, especially that of teachers and parents, so that the CLC can become integrated into the school and support the needs of others in addition to students
- Ensuring that the CLC approach is the right approach in a school at that particular time

The PRT has a good working relationship with both the CLCs and the SSCAAA and should take steps to maintain this connection. The PRT may need to adapt its role depending on how the project evolves. If additional schools become CLCs, support and professional development will be required to build capacity and support school and community level implementation. Planning for leadership succession at both the PRT and ministry level will also be important. Many initiatives undergo staff and leadership turnover after several years. Planning for changes by documenting knowledge, processes and procedures will help smooth future transitions.

The PRT's role could also involve supporting existing CLCs in continuous program improvement and sustainability through data collection, use and evaluation. Given the findings of this evaluation, we offer the following recommendations for the PRT, SSCAAA and CLCs to consider.

- Share the findings of this evaluation with stakeholders and publicize the successes of the initiative. Efforts to engage key CLC stakeholders—such as coordinators, principals, teachers, parents, school governing boards and school boards—may result in greater awareness of the CLCs' possible benefits and greater commitment to CLC success and sustainability. Greater understanding of the potential and challenges may serve to build support and buy-in from these stakeholders.
- Learn from the successful practices of those CLCs that have reached full operation and become hubs in order to extend these lessons to new or struggling CLCs. This includes having real teacher, parent, community and partner buy-in and support, along with leadership from the principal and support from the board, and developing a vision of the CLC that these groups support and can work toward.
- Review and revise resource materials, including the *Framework*, *Guidebook* and templates, based on knowledge and experiences. Because these materials were mostly developed prior to implementation of the CLC initiative, a review and revision by a committee of practitioners (coordinators, principals, and partners) along with PRT staff would likely strengthen the materials and their usefulness in planning and implementation. Such a committee might also examine whether the *Framework* might be better represented as a cyclical process that allows for periodic planning and goal setting and provides guidelines for sustainability.
- Identify the key skills and qualifications required of CLC coordinators in order to hire the most qualified candidates. The evaluation found that a successful coordinator balances community organization skills with knowledge and experience of the school system. When there is coordinator turnover, or if this initiative expands to future schools, hiring

a person with the skills to effectively manage and implement the initiative will be important, especially in the early phases of implementation.

- Work with principals and coordinators to address the issue of teacher buy-in and support. The PRT may want to consider training opportunities for teachers who could act as liaisons or teacher leaders at each of the CLCs.

Recommendations resulting from the findings and reflections on the role of the PRT in supporting the development of the initiative and the assessment of the *Framework for Action* include:

- Establishing regular opportunities for CLCs to network with each other and share successes and best practices
- Providing guidance on collecting data and measuring impact to show the value of the CLCs for students and the community
- Supporting CLCs in developing sustainability plans including elements such as:
 - A definition of sustainability for the CLC, including the scale of program to be sustained
 - A theory of sustainability or program sustainability displaying program inputs, factors affecting sustainability, funding sources and outcomes
 - Identification of what action steps are required, who needs to be involved, and what is the timeline for the work
 - Identification of anticipated challenges and possible solutions
 - A plan for tailored outreach to key decision makers
 - A promotional and marketing plan for raising awareness and disseminating information on the impact of the CLC on the community, key stakeholders, media, potential funders, and others
 - The addition of sustainability as a step in the Framework for Action
- Considering additional professional development for principals and coordinators on effective communication and shared leadership. Other potential topics include customized professional development for new CLC principals and coordinators who come into an established or struggling CLC.
- Ensuring that professional development remains relevant and high quality
- Recommending opportunities for provincial stakeholders and MELS-SSCAAA to engage in discussions to further support the CLC initiative

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